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**ASPECTS OF THE SQUAD AND THE COMPANY
IN THE CHINESE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY**

**SUBMITTED TO THE CENTER FOR CHINESE STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF
MICHIGAN, IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR A
MASTER'S DEGREE IN CHINESE STUDIES**

MAY 1991

BY CAPTAIN JOHN S. SHULTIS, UNITED STATES ARMY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	i
INTRODUCTION	xiii
CHAPTER ONE	
The Structure of the People's Liberation Army . . .	1
CHAPTER TWO	
Recruiting	35
CHAPTER THREE	
Enlisted Soldiers	66
CHAPTER FOUR	
The Company as a Microcosm of the PLA	104
CHAPTER FIVE	
Officers: The Heart of the PLA	136
CONCLUSION	179

PREFACE

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This paper came about through a providential set of circumstances. Starting at the very beginning, I suppose that I chose the University of Michigan over the excellent new program at the University of Texas-Austin under Dr. Jeannette Faurot because Ann Arbor was my father's hometown, and I had lived here as a boy, and always wanted to play quarterback for Bo Schembechler and be a Michigan Wolverine. Being completely new to the field of Chinese studies, the excellent reputation of Michigan's Center for Chinese Studies was unknown to me; nevertheless, Harlan Jencks, formerly of the Naval Postgraduate School, recommended that I attend Michigan, and I did not disregard his advice. But I also needed to consider family interests, since unlike most graduate students, I already had a beautiful wife and a lovely daughter, with another child expected during my second semester of studies, wherever we chose to go. The familiar often wins out in such circumstances, and we went "back home" to Michigan.

Providence was working ahead of us, smoothing the paths we had to tread. My status as a graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point immediately caught the attention of Dr. Michel Oksenberg, whose son David had just graduated from there in the Spring of 1989; like me, he was an Infantry officer, and was headed for the wonderful adventures and traumas of the U.S. Army's Ranger school and the challenges of leading his first infantry rifle platoon. That he was headed for Ft. Ord, whence Gretchen and

I had just departed after a year at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California, was also extremely fortuitous, as we still had plenty of friends there, and we tried to ensure that the young lieutenant received a hearty welcome to his new home. Thus began a marvelous relationship with Dr. Michel Oksenberg, including many long hours slaving away at my personal computer laboring under the seemingly endless series of revisions which streamed forth from his office. He would have made an excellent battalion commander, because he instinctively knew that people will put forth a greater effort to please and win the admiration of leaders who command respect and admiration from their subordinates; he squeezed the last drop of water out of this rock!

Dr. Oksenberg kept me on track during my stay at Michigan, directing my research into the field of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), a topic that I might have avoided otherwise, since my personal bent lies in the fields of philosophy, theology, literature, and history. He knew that as a foreign area officer specializing in China, I would need to speak knowledgeably about my counterpart service; and so he directed me into this research topic. Using his good offices, Dr. Oksenberg arranged for me to meet with a former PLA officer to discuss the possibility of comparing our military experiences and producing them in written form; this paper was the result.

The parallels in our experiences were fascinating. My PLA counterpart, whom I shall refer to as "my colleague" throughout the remainder of this paper, was born into a military family. His

father was a career officer in the PLA, whose experiences dated back to the anti-Japanese war, and the Chinese civil war. My colleague grew up living on PLA military bases, predominantly in the Beijing Military Region headquarters. He attended schools run by the PLA solely for the children of PLA officers. He joined the PLA and worked hard to become an officer, desiring to follow in his father's footsteps. Eventually, he attained the position of squad leader, and was selected as an officer candidate.

As an officer, he served two years as a platoon leader; one year as a company commander; three years as recruiter (including as a recruiting company commander two years in a row); and as a regimental operations officer in charge of training, recruiting, and logistics coordination--the latter meaning that he requisitioned ammunition for the regiment's yearly training needs, coordinated training facilities and housing for soldiers, ensured that the regiment had an adequate logistics reserve on hand for any possible combat contingency, and operated as the liaison between the operations staff and the logistics staff. His company was in a special "display" unit in the Beijing Military Region, so he had the highest caliber of troops, different uniforms and equipment than other PLA units--of a higher quality so that his soldiers would provide the best possible impression to the many foreign observers concentrated in the capital.

My background was remarkably similar. I was born into a military family, and lived on several military bases around the country, often attending schools on the base, run wholly for

military dependents. I desired to follow in my father's footsteps, and secured a nomination to West Point out of high school. As a cadet, one of my favorite activities for three years was to return home as a part of the Cadet Public Relations Council and recruit for the academy. I spoke at high schools and junior high schools, was interviewed on radio and television, and discussed aspects of the academy with potential recruits. Four years later, I graduated as a lieutenant of infantry.

My assignments as a lieutenant included one year as an infantry rifle platoon leader in a mechanized infantry battalion in Germany; then I assumed leadership of the battalion's support platoon. In this capacity, I was responsible for the battalion's ammunition, fuel and petroleum products, food, and water. We also coordinated much of the battalion's logistics support; and I worked with the battalion operations officer to forecast and requisition the unit's training and basic load ammunition (the initial stock reserved for war). After this job, I served as the executive officer for the battalion's headquarters company, and was responsible for much of the battalion's maintenance and logistics support.

After returning to the U.S., I joined the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment in Washington, D.C., the Army's official ceremonial unit. For seventeen months, I was the assistant operations officer in charge of tactical training; I was responsible for all aspects of tactical training, including the logistics support required. After this job, I commanded Company C--affectionately called "Charlie

Guard"--for nineteen months. Like my colleague, my troops were hand-picked, and therefore among the highest caliber of soldiers to be found anywhere. We had special uniforms and equipment; and a major part of our mission--considered a "real world" mission due to its tangible contribution to the deterrence role of the Army--was to impress foreign and American dignitaries with the high degree of professionalism, *esprit de corps*, and martial spirit to be found in the American fighting man.

Ultimately, like my colleague, the time came for me to leave the company level and select a functional area to supplement my basic branch assignment. I selected the foreign area officer program, and specifically the China field. This program has moved me into long-term academic pursuits: one year at the Defense Language Institute studying elementary Chinese Mandarin; two years in graduate school working on a master's degree in Chinese studies; and an additional eighteen months in Hong Kong studying Chinese at the British Ministry of Defense Chinese Language School. In this last assignment, I would also have much opportunity to see this great land which has occupied my studies, and which I have only visited via the many media available in the United States.

RESEARCH AND WRITING

The research technique that I used for this paper was to interview my subject--approximately seventy-five hours of interviews discussing my colleague's experiences in the PLA. Afterwards, I validated his information by pouring over the literature on the PLA, primarily the volumes which pertained to the

time period mainly in focus here: the Cultural Revolution and early post-Cultural Revolution years of my colleague's active service with the PLA--1969 to 1978. Particularly in that period, I found my colleague's information to be extremely accurate, providing detailed information which many authors could only guesstimate due to the dearth of information from those years. Accordingly, I was more confident after doing this "verification research" that my colleague had provided me with bonafide accounts of his thoughts, experiences, and lifestyle as a soldier and junior officer in the PLA for this period. While his personal history was not the history of every soldier and officer who entered the PLA during that period, nor even for all of those in his same division, still it represented an example of the life and events experienced by soldiers in the PLA during those years.

My scope and purpose here are necessarily narrow and specific. I desired to learn from my counterpart infantry company commander in the PLA just what his experiences were, where we differed, and where we had common background. In some sections of the paper, I discuss some of the changes made since 1978 and the ascendance of Deng Xiaoping, most significantly in Chapter Five, discussing officers and their education system. Nevertheless, my main theme here is the period already mentioned, and this one officer's view of that period. I do not purport to render a new work on every aspect of the PLA; nor have I attempted a thorough examination of the changes which have been under way since the demise of Mao Zedong. Ellis Joffe, Harlan Jencks, William Heaton and others have

already admirable performed this feat.

My hope was simply to contribute some of the missing details, at the lower levels of soldierly life, which the field had been deprived of during the past thirty years since Alexander George's monumental account of The Chinese Communist Army in Action. He used numerous interviews with hundreds of captured Chinese soldiers during the Korean War. I could not hope to approach his level of accomplishment; but I could render a fair account of the discussions which two former Infantry company commanders had over many cups of coffee, as we delved into the aspects of life in the PLA at the squad, platoon, and company levels. By maintaining that focus, I believed that solid, significant, valid conclusions could be drawn about life in the PLA in general, supported by the literature extant.

One aspect that I noticed in all of the literature that I read was that the authors spent a significant amount of their work analyzing the political-historical aspects of the PLA, and most of the works hover around the strategic features of the PLA, such as power struggles, national leadership personalities, and the outcomes of wars fought by the PLA; only cursory efforts have been made to describe the atmosphere and conditions at the lower levels which I have focused on in this paper. Particularly in the discussion of recruiting, basic training, and the features of soldier life and junior officer education and training during the decade scrutinized here, I feel that this paper made solid contributions to the body of knowledge relating to the PLA.

Some of the problems I encountered will probably be obvious to the studied eyes of those who take an interest in this work. First, having only one source created a problem, because even reliable sources were fallible, limited by their own memories, studies, and biases. Second, with one source, it was extremely difficult to extract all of the information which I desired (and Dr. Oksenberg and Dr. Kenneth Lieberthal required!) in order to make this as complete as possible. In some areas, my colleague did not really have an interest in providing much detail; some information simply was not forthcoming. More informants probably would have reduced this obstacle considerably. In some cases, my colleague did not want to portray his unit or the PLA in a bad light; so, the problems and difficulties and unpleasant aspects of life in the PLA were either missing--a glaring omission I frankly admit--or they were glossed over in such a way that they seemed to fit the Party line much too closely. One obvious example will be in the discussion of relationships between soldiers, regionalism, and ethnic problems. In these cases, I tried to extrapolate from the other literature in the field, provided my own experiences as a comparison, or attempted an analysis based simply on common sense and knowledge of human nature; otherwise, as in the case of the example cited, I have left the reader to make his or her own conclusions. All in all, however, I stand by my assertion that the information provided was, on the whole, solid, verifiable, and reliable.

A note on style: I am a story-teller, and find the many

tangents associated with a specific situation interesting and critical to the telling of the story as a whole. In most cases, particularly regarding contrasting or comparable situations from my own background as an American officer, I have pursued these tangential issues in the footnotes. If the reader does not read my footnotes, much of my analysis and commentary is lost. The text still stands as a whole unit, but the interesting facets and angles of an issue are lost. Please read the notes! They provide much information which is pertinent, but disrupts the flow of the text if inserted into the main body.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I used to skim over acknowledgements in other works, feeling little interest in reading the names of people that I did not know. After I was married, and had commanded a company, I realized that no significant effort in any endeavor in life is ever made without the help of many wonderful people. So, I began to read the acknowledgements sections of books, and enjoyed the personalizing of an author's work and daily contacts found in these sections. "For want of a nail, a shoe was lost...." The names and faces behind any effort are considerable; I want to make a humble attempt to thank those responsible for making it possible for me to complete this work.

First, as was probably apparent earlier, I must extend profound gratitude to Dr. Michel Oksenberg for his tutelage, concern, and guidance. Dr. Kenneth Lieberthal must also be acknowledged for his efforts in making this paper scholarly,

professional, and presentable. Professor John Shy allowed me to improve my grasp of this subject by affording me the opportunity to speak to the Military Studies Group about my research and thesis topic. Deeda Stanczak, Trudy Bulkley, Ena Schlorff, and the multitude of others associated with the Center for Chinese Studies deserve my thanks and applause for their unflagging efforts in keeping all of us students and faculty out of hot water. You folks are wonderful!

To my Chinese colleague and fellow infantry officer, I salute you for your perseverance, patience, hospitality, graciousness and candor. My thanks are not adequate to reward your tireless efforts towards getting this project completed. May our efforts serve the interests of peace and mutually beneficial relations between our two nations. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!"

Captain Albert Zaccor commiserated with me about the struggles of graduate school, and provided excellent comparisons and feedback about the Soviet Army. Thanks to Captain (Promotable) Barclay Butler for the extensive help in using my computer, and for graciously providing his own computer and graphics software for the illustrations used in this paper. LTC William Gregor, currently the Professor of Military Science in the Army ROTC department, and formerly one of my instructors at West Point, provided excellent analyses of the PLA and critiques of much of the literature on the PLA. Thanks also to LTC Peter Kozumplik for his advice and analyses of PLA operations, organization, and capabilities.

"Through presumption comes nothing but strife, but with those who receive counsel is wisdom."

To COL William R. Williamson, who gave me the opportunity to command those excellent soldiers in The Old Guard, LTC John Oseth, and LTC Lee Gentry I express my profound appreciation for your efforts in getting me into graduate school; and I acknowledge the influences all three made on my career choices due to the interest which you all displayed in different ways for my career and well-being.

The U.S. Army and the citizens of our nation are also to be thanked for providing me with this excellent opportunity to study and pursue interests beyond the normal experience of most infantry officers. "To whom much is given much is asked." I acknowledge my debt of gratitude and service.

My special thanks to Wes and Naomi Sealand for their marvelous help at the end of this project! They proofread the text and notes, helped me with the format, and got this thing printed and finished. Thanks for the help down the stretch! We gained new members of our family when you two arrived; all four of us will miss you dearly.

The wonderful people at Scio Community Christian and Missionary Alliance Church, Community Bible Study, and other friends and family who prayed for and encouraged both Gretchen and myself throughout this chapter of our lives are dearly loved, greatly appreciated, and will be sorely missed as we go on to Hong Kong and points as yet unknown.

"An excellent wife is the crown of her husband....A wife of noble character who can find?" I have been blessed with a wife who loves me, supports my work in every way possible, and cares for me and my children with a diligence difficult to describe, but marvelous to behold. I thank GOD for her and our children; He is also to be praised and thanked for the opportunity to study and travel, to live in this great country, and to serve with some of the finest soldiers our nation can produce. "Surely the boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places."

John S. Shultis
Captain, Infantry, USA
Ann Arbor, Michigan
May, 1991

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

The purpose of this essay was to describe in detail the lives of soldiers in the People's Liberation Army (PLA). I must note at the outset that the information provided here pertained most specifically to a distinct period of time--1969 to 1978--and to the experiences and observations of a single individual serving in the PLA as a soldier, a company grade officer, and a regimental staff officer during that period. This discussion consisted of four main parts: (1) the structure of the military units in which PLA soldiers lived and served; (2) the typical experience of an enlisted soldier from recruitment to discharge; (3) life inside a PLA infantry company; and (4) the PLA officer corps.

Although I have discussed some aspects of every level of command in the PLA, and the general structure of the PLA as an entire organization, these only served as the framework and backdrop for my main focus: life in a typical infantry company of the PLA's Beijing Military Region. I specified that detail because the Beijing Military Region's units and soldiers, like the U.S. Army's 3rd Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) and 75th Infantry Regiment (Rangers), were a cut above the average infantry unit in the PLA; my colleague's service was exclusively within this military region.

Because the vast majority of units in the PLA at the time of this writing still were dismounted infantry units; and because the command structure in the company continued to reflect the same

commanding officer-political commissar duality found at every level above the company; the infantry company was depicted here as a microcosm which reflected the PLA as a whole. Despite the changes which the PLA had undertaken in the past decade and a half, much of the information provided here continued to characterize the PLA as it entered the threshold of the post-Deng Xiaoping era. Military modernization, one of the "Four Modernizations"--including agricultural, industry, science and technology, and the military--took a backseat to the others, so rudimentary systemic changes came slowly.¹

Therefore, what was here produced for study is an insiders' view of the PLA, as well as some comparisons and contrasts with the U.S. Army where I felt that such were pertinent to highlight the similarity or uniqueness of the aspect of the PLA under discussion. In essence, though I hoped the style to be more literary and professional, what I depicted here were the conversations between two "ground-pounders" from two different armies as we compared our experiences of training, leadership, and command.

¹ Chong K. Yoon, "Problems of Modernizing the PLA: Domestic Constraints," in Larry M. Wortzel, editor, China's Military Modernization, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), pp.1, 8-10, and 19. A portion of p.19 states:

During the past eight years, since the PLA embarked on its modernization program, it has made significant strides in modernizing its organization, arms, and equipment. It has become leaner by nearly one million men, younger by from ten to twenty years, more professional, less politicized, better educated, and better armed than in 1978 when the Four Modernizations were just under way. Nevertheless, the improvement so far in arms and equipment, in general, has been made in piecemeal fashion and unevenly, and China is still at least from ten to twenty years behind her potential adversaries in major weapons systems.

Nevertheless, the majority of the concepts outlined here were still practiced or maintained an influence on practices in the day-to-day operations of the PLA.

CONTENTS

One of the interesting observations of my research was that the Cultural Revolution did not derail the PLA in its daily operations as much as one might have expected based on observations of Chinese society as a whole. For the most part, the PLA conducted business as usual. Yet, the Cultural Revolution did manage to impact in a serious manner the war-fighting capability of the PLA, much to the surprise and chagrin of its officers in 1979 during the Sino-Vietnam war. What suffered in the Cultural Revolution period was the PLA's operational and strategic capabilities; the emphasis on combat training, fieldcraft, and mastery of basic soldiering skills--all of which had served the PLA with such great results against the Japanese, the *Guomindang* (Nationalists), the Americans, the Indians, and the Soviets--remained intact at the company level.

Chapter One discussed the mission of the PLA; some of its history; its infrastructure; the political structure of the PLA and its civilian government counterparts; and the general characteristics of the PLA as an institution. I wanted to create the overall environment and background in which PLA soldiers lived and units operated. The most significant feature that I wanted to highlight in this chapter was the political structure which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had stamped as its imprimatur, not

only on the PLA, but on the whole of Chinese society. The CCP began as a revolutionary army, and Mao Zedong sought to perpetuate this revolutionary experience as a permanent feature of Chinese society by militarizing the entire country.²

Chapter Two discussed the recruiting system used by the PLA. I felt that this was the most significant chapter, especially after

² Franz Schurmann, Ideology and Organization in Communist China, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966, 1968), pp.477-478, quotes part of Ch'en Po-ta's speech to the Second Plenum of the Central Committee in November 1956, discussing communization of agriculture:

In this kind of commune, industry, agriculture, and exchange are the people's material life; culture and education are the spiritual life of the people which reflects their material life. The total arming of the people is to protect this material and spiritual life. Such an arming of all the people is necessary as long as the entire world system of exploitation of the people by other people is not decisively destroyed. Mao Tse-tung's thoughts on this kind of commune are the conclusions he has derived from the experiences of real life.

On p.479, he quotes an editorial from Red Flag, discussing the requisites of communization to safeguard the revolution:

...The working people in their drive forward have advanced the following slogans which fulfill the revolutionary spirit: Militarize Organization, Turn Action into Struggle, Collectivize Life! What is meant by the militarization of organization of course does not mean that they are really going to organize military companies, and even less does it mean that they want to give themselves officers' ranks....Though militarization in agricultural work is not for the purpose of repulsing the enemies of mankind, but for the purpose of carrying on the struggle with nature, it makes it easy to transform one of these two kinds of struggles into the other. The people's commune which combines the industrial, agricultural, commercial, educational, and military, at a time when there are no attacks from external enemies, is an advancing army [fighting] against nature, [fighting] for the industrialization of the village, the urbanization of the village, and for the happy future of communism in the villages. But if an external enemy should dare to attack us, all the people can be mobilized and armed, and made into an army decisively, resolutely, thoroughly, and completely to destroy the enemy.

reviewing the information on recruiting in the literature on the PLA. This chapter provided details which, perhaps, have not been disclosed as fully in previous works. Certainly the literature which I read did not treat it as fully; and most authors noted that information about this system did not exist, or was not clear. The system diverged profoundly from the recruiting used by the American; therefore, it proved interesting as well as informative. The recruiting system of each army reflected the missions and capabilities of each. The U.S. Army had an enormous capacity to project force beyond the borders of the United States, as well as significant forces stationed abroad; it required a recruiting system which could feed personnel into its units without disrupting the units' operations. The PLA did not have such a capability, and required massive support from the Chinese populace; therefore, its recruiting system reflected the need for good relations between the PLA and society, as well as the Maoist penchant for People's War.

Chapter Three began in the basic training unit, and followed the recruit into his regular company after this initial experience. Here, again, some detail was provided which had been woefully missing due to the closed nature of Maoist China. In this chapter, I tried to give the feeling of the spartan conditions and demanding schedule which Chinese soldiers typically faced. As General Joseph Stilwell discerned in World War II, the Chinese soldier could be a masterful warrior if given the proper leadership. The PLA provided that leadership, and the result was a tough, disciplined army.

Chapter Four looked at the company from a soldier's and a

commander's perspective. The key relationships between the commander and the political commissar were discussed in detail, as were the Chinese Community Party and the Chinese Communist Youth League at the company level. Other facets of the company were described as well, such as the Soldiers' Committee, and the duties of leaders in the unit. Either in this chapter, or in Chapter Three, I have discussed all of the major facets of company life: schedules, training, relationships between officers and men, barracks conditions, and Party life.

Chapter Five looked at the system used to select and train junior officers in the PLA. Because the changes in this area were the most significant, I spent more time here discussing the changes since 1978. Schooling, age limits, career paths, duties, Party impact, promotions, and benefits during the period in focus made up the bulk of the chapter.

One feature about the PLA which most observers of the American Army will find interesting was that the PLA had no Non-Commissioned Officer Corps. Therefore, PLA officers take on the responsibilities and duties of both NCOs and officers; it was here that the Party played a significant role, as I have discussed in Chapter Four, and again in the conclusion. In the U.S. Army, the NCO Corps was called the "backbone of the Army," and with good reason. The NCOs provided the resolute structure which allows the U.S. Army to stand upright and act upon the orders of the "head"--the officer corps. In the PLA, the officer corps must be considered the heart of the PLA, because their role was tantamount

to everything performed by the PLA. The Party structure may be considered as somewhat of a "backbone;" however, one must keep in mind that the Party takes upon itself the role of "head," too; so that analogy only works so far as a method of describing the functions and responsibilities of commander and commissar, as I noted in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER ONE

The structure of the People's Liberation Army

1.1 Mission of the PLA.

The PLA had a three-fold mission. First, it was a combat team--*zhandoudui*--charged with the defense of the Peoples' Republic of China. Second, it was a political work team--*zhengzhi gongzuodui*--concerned with maintaining and protecting the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the communist revolution within China. Finally, the PLA was a construction and production team--*shengchandui*--involved in industrial, engineering, and agricultural projects which benefit both the military and civilian sectors of Chinese society.³

The PLA operated in its first capacity on several occasions, most notably: the anti-Japanese War, 1937-1945; the Chinese Civil War, 1945-1949; the Korean War, 1950-1953; several Taiwan Straits crises (1954-55, 1958, 1962); the Sino-Indian conflict, 1962; the American-Vietnamese conflict, 1964-73; the Sino-Soviet border clashes, 1969; and the Sino-Vietnamese War, 1979.⁴ At the strategic level, the PLA was primarily a defensive army; its

³ Paul H.B. Godwin, The Chinese Communist Armed Forces, (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 1988), chapter one provides an excellent, succinct parallel discussion of these points made here, as well as a discussion of the "red vs. expert" conflict in the PRC. See also John Gittings, The Role of the Chinese Army, (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), chapters 8-12; and Ellis Joffe, Party and Army, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971).

⁴ Gerald Segal, Defending China, (London: Oxford University Press, 1985), analyzes the PLA's combat operations since 1950 and the politics behind each situation.

offensive capabilities were limited by its underdeveloped and restricted logistical capacities.⁵ Therefore, except for some battles in the Korean War, all of the PLA's operations have been conducted either inside China or within approximately three hundred miles of Chinese borders. My colleague stated that, in fact, this three hundred mile range was a major factor taken into consideration by military planners when determining the feasibility of an operation. Thus, he said that PLA historians have determined that in Korea, American commanders learned that PLA offensives lasted only seven to ten days, and then stalled due to the inability of the logistical system to sustain the operation. The Americans would pull back and wait out the offensive, then launch counteroffensives which devastated PLA units short on supplies as well as air support and firepower.

In India, after the PLA achieved such a quick and astounding success, Chinese forces withdrew from India's territory and the PRC government magnanimously offered the Indians a diplomatic settlement.⁶ He said that although the political equation was very complex as to why the PRC handled the situation the way that it did, from a military point-of-view, a withdrawal was the only

⁵ Harvey W. Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1977), p.2, states that "the PLA is organized and equipped as a defensive force with scant ability to project its armies to areas distant from China's borders." Godwin, p.88, essentially agrees--"Chinese forces facing Soviet arms are designed primarily for defensive missions." But, he notes on p.57 that "all of the PLA's combat actions since the civil war have been conducted outside the generally accepted political boundaries of the People's Republic."

⁶ Segal, pp.142 and 145.

prudent action available to the PLA. Chinese forces were simply overextended, straining their logistical resources beyond their ability to sustain the force.⁷ PLA commanders did not want to attempt prolonged combat in the rugged Himalayas during winter, with their lines of communication and supply stretched across Tibet, while the Indians were fighting on their own soil.

In 1979, the campaign against Vietnam was essentially the same type of mission. The PLA had limited objectives: to invade the northern region of Vietnam, capture several border cities and the main objective--the provincial capital of *Lang Son*--and force the Vietnamese to divert some or all of their forces which had invaded Cambodia, then withdraw back into China. All of this was planned to take place within a month's time frame.⁸ The extent and the duration of the campaign, from a military perspective, were constrained by the logistical burden such an operation placed on the support system.⁹

The PLA committed very few of its regular army soldiers to

⁷ Segal, pp.146-147, describes the PLA's logistics as superior to the Indian forces' capability, but notes that the forbidding territory of the Himalayas, the lack of concentrated population to provide the "fish in the sea" environment for the PLA, and the stretching of supply lines as the Indians retreated as factors in the decision to delay operations in late October-early November, 1962. He says also that logistics constraints influenced the decision not to follow through on their decisive victory and routing of Indian forces after 18 November.

⁸ Segal, pp.213-214. On p.220, he describes the PLA's logistical problems, and the "antiquated" logistics system used by the PLA.

⁹ Ellis Joffe, The Chinese Army after Mao, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), p.95.

logistical functions. Approximately eighty percent of the regular army personnel were combat troops. So, the bulk of the logistical support mission was accomplished by militia units. During wartime, militia soldiers provided the PLA with most of its transport, procurement, and laborers. A large portion of the transport and labor provided was by foot and by hand, which limited the range and speed of the combat forces supported by this system. This was the case in Korea, India, against the Soviets, and also against the Vietnamese, and reflected a longstanding tradition in China.¹⁰ (One should note that the terrain along much of China's borders was very often mountainous and extremely rugged, and negated many of the advantages of more technologically advanced foes, as well as necessitating manual labor and foot transport for many logistical functions of the less advanced PLA.)

The PLA operated in its second capacity in two notable time periods. Early in the Yen'an period, after the legendary Long March, the Red Army (the precursor of the PLA) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) were virtually indistinguishable.¹¹ Later, the CCP and PLA organizations overlapped, as I have described later in this chapter, and this remained a distinct feature in the PRC.

¹⁰ Roxane D.V. Sismanidas, "Chapter 14: National Defense," in Robert L. Worden, et. al., editors, China, A Country Study (China Handbook), (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1988, DA Pamphlet 550-60), pp.590-591.

¹¹ Mark Selden, The Yen'an Way in Revolutionary China, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp.58-66, discusses the emergence of guerrilla tactics and base areas, features of revolutionary warfare in China which eventually brought the CCP to power.

After the victory in 1949, until 1954 when a civilian government was formally established, the PLA governed China in its role as a political work team for the CCP. The PRC was divided into several military regions, each of which governed one or more provinces in China.¹² After the civilian government was established nationwide in 1954, the district was divested of all but its military functions in relation to the chain-of-command of the PLA.¹³

The second time period during which the PLA as a political work team governed China was during the Cultural Revolution, when the Party apparatus and much of the civilian government bureaucracy broke down; the military took control of the nation in 1968 and governed until the fall of Lin Biao in 1971.¹⁴ Although the Party re-asserted control over the military at this point, the PLA remained involved in politics to a significant degree until Deng

¹² Ellis Joffe, Party and Army, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965, 1967, 1971), p.27. See also: Harry Harding, Organizing China, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981), pp.35-36.

¹³ Harding, p.36, he describes the short-term reliance on the PLA sought by CCP leaders. In pp.67-70, he notes their recognition that regionalism vis-a-vis the center would be a problem. On p.69, he writes: "In June, 1954, the Party finally abolished the regional administrative committees and Party bureaus altogether, explaining that planned economic development once again required the 'strengthening of the concentrated and unified leadership of the central government.'"

¹⁴ Stephen Uhalley, Jr., A History of the Chinese Communist Party, (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1988), pp.153-157. See also, Harding, pp.260-261; and William W. Whitson, The Chinese High Command, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), chapter eight.

Xiaoping's ascendance in 1978-1979.¹⁵

My colleague recounted an experience in 1970 during which he performed one of the many tasks which the PLA undertook in this period. After completing basic training, one of his first duties was to take care of the pigs on the company's farm. He was fourteen when he joined the PLA. At age fifteen, in 1970, he was sent to an elementary school to teach the children about the PLA and the Party. For one glorious month, he taught several hundred children about PLA history, Mao Zedong thought, and he drilled them in basic military drills. His classes usually took place on the playground, where the children would sit and listen to him speak. They called him "*Jiefangjun Shushu*"--"PLA Uncle." After the month was over, he returned to his unit and his pigs!

On a more serious note, the notion that the PLA would be involved in the governance of the PRC was not surprising. During the revolutionary days, 1927-1949, as I noted above, the CCP and the PLA were essentially the same entity. The leaders of the former were the leaders of the latter; and they were involved in a guerilla war for the ultimate control of China. Further, the PLA, because of its inseparable involvement in the conquest of China for the cause of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought, considered itself the vanguard of the CCP and the guarantors of the Chinese Communist

¹⁵ Joffe, The Chinese Army After Mao, pp.19-23. Uhalley, p.169, notes that in the months after Lin Biao's demise, five of the eleven State Council members appointed were PLA generals, and that "the military remained entrenched in the provinces while radical representatives on the provincial revolutionary committees continued to be displaced."

Revolution.¹⁶ (This thought should remain in the forefront of anyone's mind when they are analyzing the PLA's role in events such as the crushing of the Beijing Spring movement in 1989.)

In its role as a production and construction team, the PLA maintained the essential relationship between the PLA and the people which Mao likened to fish and water. The PLA were the fish moving effortlessly through the sea of people in China, nurtured and strengthened by remaining in their natural environment. This relationship, called "*junmin guanxi*"--literally "military-people relationship"--was considered crucial to the success of the PLA in its operations in China; the concept rooted to the revolutionary days of the 1930s and 1940s when the PLA fought the *Guomindang* (KMT) and the Japanese, and successfully utilized Mao's guerilla warfare theory to fight and survive by hiding in the vast sea of people which was rural China.¹⁷ Agriculturally, the PLA performed

¹⁶ I attribute this conception of the PLA's self-image to Lieutenant Colonel William Gregor, U.S. Army, a former PLA analyst for the Army, and a political science instructor of mine during my days as a cadet at the Military Academy. A full treatment of LTC Gregor's concept is found in his paper, "The Army Cannot Be Neutral: Military Professionalism and Political Reliability in the PLA," prepared for the conference on The Role of the Military in Communist Societies, Air Force Command and Staff College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, November 22-24, 1975. For an alternative view of the PLA as more of a tool of government, removed from politics, see Joffe, The Chinese Army After Mao, p.162. His view is supported by Major Lonnie D. Henley, U.S. Army, "China's Military Modernization: A Ten Year Assessment," in Larry M. Wortzel, China's Military Modernization: International Implications, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), p.102.

¹⁷ Whitson made numerous references to the resistance of many professional officers to Maoist ideas, strategy, and tactics, whenever they could be avoided. See the following: pp.54-57, 82, 289-90, 455-457 as examples of his thesis. I believe his research illustrates a tension which often occurs in history: the trained

two vital functions. First, they helped the peasant population with planting and with bringing in the harvest.¹⁸ Second, they also harvested their own crops which provided a supplement to their food rations which significantly improved the lot of PLA soldiers over the majority of the Chinese populace. I have discussed this "side production" in greater detail in chapter four.

As a construction work team, the PLA had some units which were involved in national projects on short and long term bases. Some of these projects lasted a year or more. For instance, in 1986, the city of Tianjin needed to build a canal from the Luan River, one hundred kilometers distant, to the city. Tianjin, like much of

military professional's disdain for charismatic or authoritarian political leaders who appropriate for themselves the status and position of a military expert. Consider these few examples: Hitler's problems with his generals; American generals' problems with certain presidents, particularly McClellan-Lincoln, and Truman-MacArthur; and most recently, General Norman Schwarzkopf's scornful remarks about Saddam Hussein's abilities as a military expert. Whitson's point here was that Maoist tactics and Mao's thoughts receive much greater credit for the Communists' victory than they deserve.

¹⁸ As Robert Dernberger, an economist at the University of Michigan who specializes in the economy of China, has noted, China has an overabundance of labor and manpower except during the planting and harvesting seasons. Then, because of the labor intensive nature of Chinese agriculture, they do not have enough manpower, even if they were to add the population of India to their labor force. They literally cannot take all of the harvest in, and much of it goes to waste in the fields and on the vines. Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, pp.143-145, questions whether the PLA, in reality, provided any significant help to the peasants. He cites calculations by Bernhard Grossman, which claim that the PLA contribution to civilian agricultural labor has never exceeded 0.05%. Instead, the PLA has largely been involved in these types of ventures for their own benefit, seeking to become totally independent and self-sufficient. However, John Gittings, The Role of the Chinese Army, provides a counterpoint to Nelsen's views, in chapter 9, "The PLA and Society."

northern China, was extremely short of water. The 66th Field Army (equivalent to a corps) was stationed in Tianjin; so, the local government leaders requested that this unit provide manpower, equipment, and the technical resources needed to complete this project. The 66th Army assigned the mission to the 198th Infantry Division. The entire division worked on this project until the canal was completed--approximately one year in duration. A decade earlier, in 1975-1976, after the PRC had opened to the West, this same Army had provided a regiment to work as teamsters and dockworkers because the Tianjin Harbor had a terrible backlog of foreign goods which could not be moved fast enough to handle the immense volume of ship traffic coming into the harbor. This regiment worked in the harbor for six months; they mirrored the efforts of dozens of other military units in harbors across the country which were mobilized for these missions because of similar problems during this initial "opening up" period in 1975-1976, which overwhelmed the inexperienced and understaffed transportation sector of the Chinese economy.¹⁹

¹⁹ Carl Riskin, China's Political Economy, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), on pp.273 and 365 provides discussions on the shortcomings of the transportation sector in the Chinese economy. Robert Dernberger's lectures on the economy of the PRC amplified this problem--this sector has created tremendous bottlenecks which continue to hamper economic development; these problems are magnified by the socialist outlook that investment should not be wasted in sectors of the economy which will not produce tangible profits. Riskin says that these "non-productive sectors are those that provide services whose values are not directly included in the costs of material products (as, say, freight transport is). Housing, education, medical care, cultural, sports and recreational services, military services, and administration (except within enterprises) are the principle non-productive services." (p.273) The effect on the military becomes

The three elements of the PLA's mission were interwoven with one another and the concept of *junmin guanxi*. The PLA's history, its capabilities, and the nature of Chinese politics--Mao's dictum that "power grows out of the barrel of a gun"--contributed significantly to the evolution of these roles. The mission of any army will frame the structure of that army.²⁰ However, before explaining the macrostructure and microstructure of the PLA, the nature of command in the PLA must be understood first, particularly the commanding officer-political commissar relationship, and the command-Party overlap which was imprinted on every level of the macro- and microstructure in the PLA from the military region headquarters down to the company level.

1.2 Command of the PLA.

The military region had one commander and one political commissar, two or three deputy commanders and two or three deputy political commissars. At the region command, there was a military region command Party committee and a region headquarters Party committee. The former supervised all of the military Party committees and Party affairs at each of the subordinate levels of

apparent when one considers that these problems have not been overcome in China as of this writing, and the PLA's modernization, one of the "four modernizations" (agriculture, industry, science, and military), was placed behind the other three, and waited and depended on the development of the Chinese economy as a whole. Dernberger concludes that the Chinese do not have a solution to these problems, and lag farther and farther behind in their development efforts as a result.

²⁰ Whitson, pp.3-7, provides an excellent discussion of this idea in his description of military ethic and style, and how these shape and influence organization and the use of military power.

command within the entire region. The Party committee secretary for this military region command Party committee was the military region's political commissar. The deputy party committee secretary was the region's commanding officer. The commander and the political commissar had equal rank, and both were charged equally with the responsibilities of overseeing the region and its subordinate commands.²¹ In military affairs, the commander dominated; in Party affairs, the commissar dominated. Likewise, the deputies, command and political, had equal rank and equal responsibility. Their different functions were simply a matter of division of labor; their equality reflected the gravity with which the CCP views political and military affairs--essentially, it believed them to be inseparable.

The region headquarters party committee was the local party committee for the headquarters as a separate unit. The headquarters Party committee secretary was one of the deputy political commissars for the district command; the deputy Party committee secretary was one of the deputy commanders for the district. This headquarters Party committee supervised only the Party committees and Party affairs within the headquarters and its

²¹ Whitson, pp.451-452, contrasts the Maoist and professional military ethics and styles as they pertain to this commander-commissar relationship. He remarks on p.452 that commanders generally view commissars as a nuisance; but notes, as well, that even under conditions of domestic insurgency that "the commissar was so burdened with nonprofessional functions in support of military operations that he rarely had time to disagree with the commander over the division of labor between them (personal power issues) or over operational plans (strategy and tactics)." (pp.451-452)

subordinate bureaus.

Within the region headquarters were three bureaus: operations--silinbu--logistics--houqinbu--and politics--zhengzhibu. These bureaus maintained direct vertical links to their General Department counterparts (see Figure 3), as well as their counterparts in the region's subordinate commands.²² The Party committee secretaries for the bureaus are the bureau chiefs themselves, and the deputy secretaries are the deputy bureau chiefs; since these were staff sections, there were no political commissars, per se, in these bureaus or their Party committees. This command-Party overlap was reproduced at the field army level, at the division level, and again at the regimental level. Each level's *command* Party committee supervised the Party committees of subordinate units, while the *headquarters* Party committee only supervised the Party committees of the subordinate bureaus within the headquarters itself. (See Figure 1). As seen in Figure 1, the headquarters Party committees were subordinate to the command Party committees, also.

Regimental command Party committees supervised the Party committees and Party affairs of their subordinate battalions; and battalions, in turn, supervised their companies. At these last two levels, however, there were no headquarters to speak of, simply command elements, special heavy weapons units, and cooking/logistics units which provided the bare-bones necessities

²² Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, pp.54-58. See also my discussion in Chapter Five about career tracks for officers.

to these command elements and heavy weapons units.²³ (See Figure 4). Thus, there were no separate headquarters Party committees nor any bureau Party committees. The battalion Party committee consisted of the battalion commander, the deputy commander, political commissar, deputy political commissar, and the three political commissars from the battalion's subordinate companies. This illustrated an important redundancy: the Party committee secretary at each level was a member of the Party committee at the next highest level. This redundancy worked all the way up the chain-of-command to the military region command level. Therefore, the Party ensured effective political control at every level.²⁴

In the company, there was one Party committee (called a branch), and three or four Party groups which corresponded to the platoons within the company; the fourth group covered the logistics

²³ Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, pp.243-244. These charts were prepared by Harlan Jencks; the company structure differs somewhat from the information supplied by my colleague; but I will have to assume that my colleague knew exactly what his company units and organization were like, just as I clearly recall my rifle company's structure and variations from the doctrinal prototype.

²⁴ Whitson, p.452: "As early as 1931, the Party apparently wished to confine the military professionals to a relatively narrow sphere of activity and to limit command authority to professional military matters. By placing the military under the overall supervision of a Party organ--the Revolutionary Military Council (which later became the Military Affairs Committee)--and by having military activities monitored by "Party soldiers" (General Political Department military commissars), the Party hoped to keep the military responsive to the Party's authority at the national and local levels. But the Party's efforts to play a dominant role outside the military sphere have been frustrated by the actual evolution of the PLA. During many long periods (prior to 1950, for example, and after the spring of 1967), the military dominated the Party rather than the reverse."

squad and the firepower squads. In my colleague's company, which he considered fairly representative of the norm, approximately one-third of his soldiers were Party members, making the average size of Party groups roughly eight to ten members.²⁵ The company Party committee just mentioned reflected the basic structure of all Party committees. Party committees acted as the supervisory element for the Party within a unit. Not all of the Party members in a unit were in the Party committee. Instead, they were assigned to small Party groups. Beneath the supervisory umbrella of each Party Committee, there were several Party groups. (See Figure 2). Party groups met weekly and conducted the following business: (1) Each member reviewed whether his life during the past week reflected Party doctrine and commitment to the Party and its goals; (2) Members studied and discussed Party documents, speeches, and other materials.

The command-Party relationship in the PLA was an overlapping one of shared responsibilities and division of labor and duties.

²⁵ Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, p.52, deflates this figure to approximately one Party member per squad, or 12-15% of the company's personnel. In actuality, his company probably represented the ideal type, since it was a unit within the Beijing Military Region, and was filled with the best types of soldiers--taller, more educated, and with more politically reliable backgrounds. Therefore, they had a higher percentage of potential Party members than the norm to begin with. This was similar to my experience as a company commander in the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment, the Army's honor guard unit in Washington, D.C.; we could pick and choose our soldiers and officers from among the Army's ranks in order to ensure that we had the best possible men. Like his soldiers, we also had in-depth background investigations which were much more rigorous than the usual, since our mission placed us in close contact with high-ranking government officials like the President, Secretary of Defense, and foreign government officials and heads of state.

This relationship provided the CCP effective control of the military, and essentially made the PLA and the CCP united in theory and practice.²⁶ This relationship was reflected in the civilian sector of society, and, indeed, overlapped with the military and Party structures. There were actually three layers of command and control in Chinese society: the civilian government, the PLA, and the CCP.

Each level of civil government had a corresponding military organization through which it controlled its organic forces and coordinated with the PLA on other matters, such as recruiting, production/construction team support from the PLA, and militia logistical support to the PLA. (See Figure 3). Technically, these military organizations belonged to the local civilian government at each level. However, the formal rank of the civilian head of each government level below the region was equal to and not superior to the rank of the military organization chief at these levels.²⁷ This was particularly significant during a period of national

²⁶ Michel Oksenberg, in reviewing this section, commented that the relationship more precisely provided the Military Affairs Committee (MAC) with effective control of the PLA, since the chain-of-command flows down directly from the MAC. However, he stated that equating the MAC with the CCP was problematic. In light of the events of June, 1989, Deng's official retirement from the MAC and Central Military Commission of the National People's Congress in favor of Jiang Zemin--while Deng effectively retains power as the ultimate leader of China, outside of any official connection with the Party and government organ--my inclination is to agree with Dr. Oksenberg; this certainly is a problematic equation.

²⁷ Paul Godwin, pp.65-66; the discussion on the militia at each level and the charts he uses to explain this system support this point. Godwin's description of the structure verifies the information here and in Figure 3.

emergency, when the PLA became the dominant tool of Party control, as was seen immediately after the Communist victory in 1949, and again during the latter stages of the Cultural Revolution. This rank system provided a bridge between the PLA forces and the civil government at each level: each had equivalent rank with the other, and the military organization chief also shared the same rank. It also demanded that intractable disputes be worked out at higher levels, thereby reinforcing the Center's power.²⁸

At the province, the provincial military garrison command was the military bureau which executed control over all of the local army divisions and militia units within the province. At the prefecture, likewise, the prefectural military garrison command controlled its local force division and militia. These two garrison commands had no armor units, and only a few artillery units; similarly, their divisions had no organic armor units and very few artillery assets.

At the county level, the military organ was called the county military department. These were subordinate to the prefectural military garrison command; they controlled their organic militia units and their subordinate production brigades' militia units. The production brigades also had military departments.

1.3 Types of units in the PLA.

²⁸ This is a phenomenon which is particularly acute in Chinese politics. See Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg, Policy Making In China, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988) for a full treatment of this subject of bureaucratic politics and the interdependence of patrons and clients in Chinese government and politics.

The PLA had four types of units, as I mentioned above. The first to consider was the field army--*yezhangjun*.²⁹ These units constituted the regular army, and were considered a national or federal force. They were directly controlled by the region commands. They were the most modernized forces, received the highest budgets, and had the highest percentage of personnel. All of the mechanized infantry divisions, tank divisions and other armor units belonged to the field armies, as well as specialized units such as air defense, air force, navy, and missile units.³⁰ These forces were often referred to as "main" or strategic forces, contrasting their mission with the local armies and militia.³¹ Eighty percent of their personnel and units were combat forces. The PLA felt that such a ratio of combat forces to support personnel maximized their combat power per dollar of budget. Any unlimited offensive capability beyond Chinese borders certainly had to be conducted primarily by these units, supported by the rest of the PLA structure.

²⁹ Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, p.3, calls these "main force units." Henley, p. 109, calls them "field armies"--the same term used by my colleague and the term used in this paper. Likewise on the local forces: Nelsen, p.3, designates these "regional forces," while Henley, p.107, uses local forces, as does my colleague.

³⁰ Nelsen, p.1, states that all service arms--ground forces, air forces, naval forces, and strategic missile forces--fall under the organizational umbrella of the PLA, unlike our services which are separated in different departments under the Department of Defense.

³¹ Angus M. Fraser, The People's Liberation Army, (New York: Crane, Russak and Company, 1973), pp.19-20; citing Harvey Nelsen, Fraser writes about the differences between the main/field forces and the regional/local forces, their missions, and their loyalties.

In the PLA, units were placed into the two categories previously discussed--field armies and local armies--and they were given rankings from first to third class.³² The field armies were ranked according to the rankings of their three divisions. A first class army had three first class divisions, and the full complement of armor, artillery, anti-aircraft and other units; these units were fully prepared for combat at all times. A second class army had one first class division, two second class divisions, at least two regiments of artillery, and one regiment of armor. Third class armies had one first class division, one second and one third class division, and at least one regiment of armor.³³ All field armies had at least one first class division and one second class division.

From the army level on down, the structure is complete for all of these units. Manpower shortages and equipment variations made up the differences between the three rankings. Each army had its full complement of divisions; divisions had their full complement of regiments; and so on, down through the company level and its subordinate platoons and squads. The officer and leader cadre structures were complete, as well.

³² Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, pp.115-116, refers to three types of infantry corps/armies. His description varies somewhat from the description here, but implies a system of ranking units.

³³ Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, p.90, mentions "two or three types of army-corps divided according to the amount of vehicles, armor, and artillery in each."

Divisions were ranked according to their assigned manpower.³⁴ All divisions usually had their full allotment of officers; first class divisions--*jiajishi*--had approximately 12,000 troops, which was their fully authorized strength. Second class divisions--*yijishi*--had sixty to seventy percent of assigned personnel, perhaps 8,000 soldiers. Third class divisions--*bingjishi*--had 4,000 to 7,000 troops, or thirty-five to fifty percent. Mechanized divisions were always first class divisions, as were tank divisions, artillery divisions, navy and air force units.

These standings did not rotate amongst units. A unit not only had a set percentage of personnel, but they also had their full complement of equipment (if first class). So, it behooved the PLA to maintain continuity along these lines. My colleague considered that filling the second and third class divisions was no problem, due to the tens of millions of reservists and militia available. Of course, procuring equipment and material might have been a problem; but since these divisions were essentially dismounted infantry, he did not think that was a major obstacle, either.

Units were ranked according to their weapons systems, combat power, quality of soldiers, the combat experience of their officers, and their educational level. The history of units played

³⁴ Nelsen, p.116, notes that the type C corps was approximately two-thirds the size of types A and B. Therefore, type C units would probably fit the second class category described here. The third class category was generally found in the local forces. DIA's 1976 Handbook on The Chinese Armed Forces, pp.A-3 and A-19 to 21 gives the organization and manpower of field army divisions (A-3) and local force divisions (A-19 to 21), which had approximately 50% of the strength of a field force division.

a very important role in the classification process.³⁵ A long, successful history benefitted a unit in this process. A good classification ensured that a unit remained in the thick of things when new equipment and other benefits were handed out. First class units received priority on new weapons systems, the best officers, and opportunities for education and training. Military schools provided graduates to first class units first. The next type of unit was the local army--*difang budui*. These units were comparable to our National Guard; however, they were not part-time forces, but regular army units specifically organized for the defense of their host provinces. Previously, they were controlled by the provincial and prefectural garrison commands--*shengjunqu* and *junfenqu*. They generally did not train outside their provinces, and were only involved in combat within and along the borders of the province. They were purely dismounted infantry divisions, and provided internal security, border patrol, and civilian government support.³⁶ In the early 1980s, the PLA cut 500,000 of these troops out of the PLA, and transferred another 500,000 to the Peoples' Armed Police--*wuzhuang jingcha*--under the control of the Public

³⁵ Whitson, The Chinese High Command, pp.498-517, discusses the field army elites and how their emergence influenced the placement of units, promotions, and other matters. From his discussion, it is possible to extrapolate this system of classifying units and decisions made about modernization and budget issues.

³⁶ Godwin, pp.86-88. There were three types of regional forces: (1) Border defense divisions; (2) internal defense divisions; and (3) Garrison divisions--for coastal defense roles.

Security Bureau--Gonganbu.³⁷ Local armies were usually filled with one to five third class divisions, the number depending on the location and situation of the province.

My colleague said that the forces used against India in 1962 were not field armies, but the infantry divisions of the Tibetan District Command--local army units.³⁸ This supported his contention that the quick withdrawal after the successful campaign against India was planned and necessary, since local forces had even less capacity to operate offensively beyond China's borders than the field armies did. In 1969, during the Sino-Soviet dispute, most of the units involved were local army forces, mainly

³⁷ Joffe, The Chinese Army After Mao, p.153, describes the massive size of the Peoples Armed Police: "by 1985, the Armed Police had established 29 divisions, 564 regiments and 1,029 battalions. It had also set up three academies for basic-level officers, as well as a naval academy and a medical school. The formidable size of this organization provides a striking illustration of the extent to which the PLA must have been absorbed in civil affairs after it had taken on internal security duties. The transfer of these duties to the Armed Police was, therefore, a major move towards the withdrawal of the PLA from non-military matters at the basic levels of society." Henley, p. 107, reports the same numbers as my colleague does here. The CIA chart on the Military Organizations of the People's Republic of China, however, places the Peoples Armed Police under the PLA organizational umbrella as one of the service arms, like navy, air force, etc., rather than under the Public Security Bureau.

³⁸ Segal, pp.146-147, says that PLA troop strength rose only 20% above normal, and these added forces probably had little bearing on the outcome. Local forces, due to conditions in Tibet since 1950, were well-trained, equipped and supplied for combat in the mountains. The Indians never matched the PLA in troop strength or any of these other factors, and never had even local superiority in battles between the two armies.

coming from the province of Heilongjiang.³⁹ The 1979 Vietnam War involved a mixture of field armies and local forces; divisions from Yunnan, Guangdong and Guangxi provinces--the three provinces adjacent to Vietnam--provided one-third to one-half of the total troops involved. The Guangzhou and Kunming district commands executed that mission.⁴⁰

The third type of unit was the militia. Before 1985, no official reserve system existed in China. The militia performed this role.⁴¹ In 1985, the PLA established the fourth type of military unit: a reserve system specifically for the field armies. This reserve force was similar to our reserve system in their status as a national or federal reserve--they did not belong to the provinces, as the local armies and militia units did.⁴²

The PLA was composed of so many combat troops and so few support troops, that the militia performed a crucial function for the PLA by comprising the bulk of the PLA's logistical tail during

³⁹ Segal, pp.183-185. These were clearly large-scale frontier clashes in march; the PLA only moved four or five divisions up to the border regions in 1968 in preparation for these confrontations. But the August clashes in Xinjiang caused China to step up its preparations for a Soviet attack, including a large-scale civil defense program.

⁴⁰ Segal, p. 219. Also, Harvey W. Nelsen, "The Organization of China's Ground Forces," in Ray Bonds, editor, The Chinese War Machine, (London: Salamander Books Ltd., 1979), p.87.

⁴¹ Gittings, p.210.

⁴² Sismanidas, China Handbook, p.591.

wartime.⁴³ The militia also performed the part-time and emergency functions usually associated with the National Guard in the United States, although these types of missions are not exclusive to the militia. Essentially, then, the militia performed two tasks: (1) Public or internal security; and (2) the reserve and logistical role in support of PLA regular forces.⁴⁴

The militia system was very large and complicated. An important characteristic of the PRC's civilian-military overlap was that each level of civilian government had its corresponding military rank. Every level of the civilian government had an organic militia force commensurate with the equivalent military rank corresponding to the level of civil government. Therefore, each production brigade had its own militia company, communes had battalions, and counties had large numbers of battalions, depending on the number of communes in the county.⁴⁵ The prefectural level maintained one or more divisions of militia; and the province controlled all of these divisions as an equivalent army command

⁴³ See Edgar O'Ballance, The Red Army of China, (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), pp.204-205, for a terse discussion of the militia earlier in the PRC's history; these elements of his discussion remained pertinent throughout the period in focus in this paper.

⁴⁴ Nelsen, "The Organization of China's Ground Forces," pp.83-87. Three types of militia: (1) Armed militia, which was a "ready reserve" for the PLA regular forces; (2) Basic militia provided the logistics support and labor required by the PLA; (3) Common militia, which provided a military framework and organization for the population-at-large during times of mobilization and emergency.

⁴⁵ Nelsen, "Organization," p.83. He discusses the theoretical, whereas my colleague discussed the actual organization as he encountered it as a recruiter. Godwin's illustration, p.55, corresponds much closer to the conceptualization described here and in Figure 3.

level.⁴⁶

Large cities also had militia units.⁴⁷ Large cities were equivalent in rank to provinces, with corresponding garrison commands and military departments. Each *danwei*--work unit--formed its own militia unit; a large *danwei* may form an entire division of militia. For example, in Beijing, *Shoudu Gantie Gongs*i--Capital Iron and Steel Corporation--with between forty- to fifty-thousand workers, maintained its own militia division. In cities, therefore, militia units were organized according to *danwei* and industries. The steel industry formed several militia divisions, as did the coal mining industry. Universities, as separate *danwei*, also formed militia units--although he questioned just how large and how effective these were. Every *danwei* had a branch within it responsible for the formation of militia, even if the *danwei* was as small as two hundred workers.⁴⁸

Large cities, therefore, had an enormous amount of military forces--a further reflection of the defensive nature of the PLA. Prior to 1985, the Beijing garrison commanded four local force divisions; in addition, according to my colleague, they had "too much" militia, numbering between five hundred thousand and one

⁴⁶ Nelsen, "Organization," p.83; what he describes as a provincial military district appears to be the organization which my colleague terms the provincial garrison command.

⁴⁷ Godwin, p.54.

⁴⁸ Godwin, pp.54-55; he discusses urban militia. His numbers and size of units were significantly smaller than my colleague's; however, his figures tended to be significantly smaller than other observers, such as Gittings and Nelsen.

million militia troops! He recalled as a boy watching a National Day celebration one year, and remembers the impressive sight of one hundred thousand *shoudu minbing*--Capital Peoples' Guards--marching through *Tiananmen Square*.

Generally, militia units were made up of both de-activated military personnel from regular army units, and civilians with no service experience.⁴⁹ The military departments at the county and brigade level kept track of former soldiers and their statuses, especially if they served in units with special technical functions, such as air force, navy, armor, and artillery units. These soldiers were tracked, even if they were not actively involved in the militia; this was similar to our inactive and individual ready reserves.

Militia members received at least one month of military training per year; the wintertime, between harvest and planting seasons was the favored period for training.⁵⁰ Training included: marksmanship, military drill (such as marching), grenade training, bayonet training, engineering and field fortifications--foxholes, trenches, tank ditches and minefields; special units like anti-tank, anti-aircraft, and artillery also received training.⁵¹ Militia units were organized as infantry, anti-tank, anti-aircraft,

⁴⁹ Nelsen, "Organization," pp.86-87.

⁵⁰ Nelsen, "Organization," pp.86-87, points out that only armed and basic militia receive training.

⁵¹ Nelsen, "Organization," pp.86-87; militia training and equipment, particularly for the armed militia, improved dramatically in the 1970s.

or artillery units. All militia members had weapons, and units had the organic weapons needed to accomplish their missions.⁵²

Militia units usually supported PLA operations within their local areas. Their primary role in support of the PLA field and local forces was logistical support--transportation, laborers for building field fortifications. Mobilization of the militia was basically accomplished in two ways: (1) selective mobilization; and (2) full mobilization--something almost unimaginable, due to the scale involved; I did not discuss it here. In the first case, if the PLA required a certain number of militia, as reserves or in a logistics role, they made a special request, which went to the provincial garrison command for approval. Then, the provincial garrison command mobilized a given number of units and personnel. Generally, these mobilizations affected whole units, in order to enhance unit cohesion and ensure unity of command.

Each regular army unit had its partnership unit among the local militia units where the regular unit is stationed.⁵³ The regular army units sent officers to help train the militia soldiers; militia units also trained alongside their partners,

⁵² This contention is open to speculation. Certainly the armed militia and basic militia had arsenals and the capability of being armed. But the figures reported by Gittings, p.209, and Nelsen, "Organization," p.86--from 100 million to over 200 million--cast a shadow of doubt on a poor, developing nation like China's capacity to arm so many militia members, alongside the needs of the PLA. Clearly, my colleague's remarks refer to the armed and basic militia, not the common militia. See O'Ballance, pp.204-205, for more information.

⁵³ Godwin, p.67; his remarks in this section infer such a relationship, and support the concept here.

learning tactical and operational skills. In return the militia agreed to support the regular army units with soldiers, and pre-arranged replacement and reinforcement agreements smoothed the way for whole militia units to join their partners in event of mobilization. Since many PLA regular units were deliberately short on manpower, this relationship worked very well as a method to quickly and efficiently fill those units in an emergency. Since regular army units were necessarily located within provinces and other localities, such an arrangement furthered the effects of *junmin guanxi* which was so vital to the PLA's desired "fish and water" relationship with the Chinese people.⁵⁴

The public/internal security role of the militia partially explained the fact that the militia mainly formed combat units--infantry, artillery, anti-tank, and anti-aircraft--when their primary role was logistical support for the PLA. In theory, the local government could mobilize militia for local security purposes. Also, theoretically, militia forces could then be "federalized" in the same way that President Eisenhower federalized the Arkansas National Guard in 1954, thereby shifting their mission from the one directed by the local commander to one directed by the central government. Generally, when local militia were called into action, the central government did so to quell local unrest which was nationally disturbing and significant. In the April 5th Event of 1976, the Party mobilized one-hundred-thousand militiamen to

⁵⁴ Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, pp.143-145, expresses skepticism about the realities of this relationship. Certainly it suffered as a result of the events of 1989.

surprise the demonstrators in Tiananmen Square. Again, in the June 4th, 1989, event there were a fairly large number of militia units involved, although he could not speculate on the number. The militia played a vital role in the planning and execution of PLA operations, national security interests as defined by the CCP, as well as in the calculations of potential adversaries considering the feasibility of offensive operations inside China. This latter idea, deterrence, provided the remainder of the explanation for the militia's combat arms orientation in spite of its essentially service support role for the PLA.⁵⁵

The new reserve system was not so complicated as the militia system.⁵⁶ Their function was very specific, and they were constituted precisely for that function. The reserve units activated by the PLA were considered active reserve units. These units were wholly infantry, artillery, and armor units. They were staffed and commanded by full-time regular army, career military officers. The soldiers who filled out these units were the reservists; generally, they were the cream of the crop from local militia units, and regular PLA soldiers who had completed their

⁵⁵ Sismanidas, China Handbook, pp.590-591, mentions the border defense role of the militia, its internal security role, and its service support role for the PLA. She also refers to the militia's guerrilla operations capacity behind enemy lines.

⁵⁶ Whitson, p.99; apparently, this is the revival of a system, which, as Whitson describes, Peng Dehuai attempted to institute in the PLA after 1953, based on Russian models and doctrine, which, in turn, was strongly influenced by the Prussian-German system.

military service and had been de-activated.⁵⁷ These reserve units conducted training three months out of the year; so their requisite skill level was much higher than the militia. Soldiers also received uniforms, which also separated them from the militia soldiers.⁵⁸

The PLA created this system in order to maximize their potential combat power per dollar of budget. In 1980, the PLA had approximately five million soldiers under arms in the regular army units. By 1985, utilizing this system, they claimed to have cut

⁵⁷ Godwin, p.55, states that "reservists are those who have served on active duty [with the PLA]; militia are those who have not." Also, Sismanidas, p.591:

The 1984 Military Service Law stipulated the combination of the militia and the reserve service system. Military training for senior middle-school and college and university students commenced in 1984 as China sought to provide additional qualified reserve-service officers. The reserve force consisted primarily of the militia and was organized into reserve-service divisions and regiments. In 1987 China began to make reference to the National Defense Reserve Force, which apparently consisted of reserve soldiers (including all militia, demobilized soldiers, and specialized technical personnel registered for reserve service) and reserve officers (including demobilized officers and soldiers assigned to reserve officer service, college and university graduates, and civilian cadres and specialized cadres).

Sismanidas' comments provide support for my colleague's contention that the size of the officer corps actually has not decreased, but indeed has grown in size; using a reserve status designation makes these personnel seem part-time, or inactive. However, as noted in the text of this paper, these officers actually remain on active duty; their troops are the part-time reservists.

⁵⁸ Godwin, p.54. Apparently, this reserve system was built on the armed militia concept. Nelsen, "Organization," p.87, notes that armed militia, prior to this reserve system's inception, received pay, their officers served full time, and they received expanded training, better equipment and rations, and actually performed active duty missions such as border patrols.

back to three million.⁵⁹ Most of the troops eliminated were infantry, and local force units. Part of the "cutbacks" were actually shifts of local army units into the Peoples' Armed Police. The numbers of "high-technology" troops--armor, artillery, navy, air force, missile, etc.--did not diminish. The benefit of this system, besides the savings in budget, came from the relative ease and high speed with which reserve forces could be mobilized. He estimated that a reserve division could be fully mobilized in three to seven days.

In actuality, although the size of the standing army decreased by two million, the potential combat power of the PLA did not diminish, because the number of officers and the number of units increased; just the number of standing army troops diminished, and the obsolete local force units were dropped from the force structure.⁶⁰ The principle employed by the PLA for all of these

⁵⁹ John Robert Young, The Dragon's Teeth, (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p.121: various observers, such as Young, look askance at the PRC claims of force reductions. Recall the numbers of Peoples Armed Police reported by Joffe--these units came from somewhere in the PLA structure; and CIA considered them to still be under the PLA banner. (CIA "Military Organizations of the People's Republic of China" chart, LDA 90-14715, August 1990). In a discussion with Major Lonnie D. Henley, U.S. Army, he said that, officially, the PAP goes under the heading of the *Gonganbu*, the Public Security Bureau; however, under any situation involving serious unrest--like the events of June, 1989--the PAP will almost certainly come under the control of the PLA. In that regard, if one counts the PAP as a part of the PLA, then the officer cutbacks are not what they have been billed to be by the PRC. See my footnote reference Roxane Sismanidas above.

⁶⁰ Henley, p.107, describes these cuts: "Reductions in headquarters and staffs constitute a major part of the 500,000 officer billets being eliminated. The consolidation of eleven military regions into seven helped eliminate 50 percent of the regional staff positions, and the general departments trimmed their

changes in 1985 was simply that the PLA ought to involve itself in national security affairs; the Public Security Bureau should handle internal security. This system strikingly resembles what the Germans did with their military between the two world wars in order to escape detection and resistance by the Allies as they re-built their military might.⁶¹

I have already commented on the parallel nature of the civilian chain-of-governmental command and the military chain-of-command.⁶² This was an important feature in the civil-military overlap. Beneath the district military command were the subordinate army commands, equivalent in size and function to our corps. The army commander, the civilian head of the provincial government, and the provincial garrison commander all held the same rank.

After the army came the division commander, who was equivalent

own strength by 23.8 percent....By January, 1987, the force had been cut by 410,000 men and over 300,000 officers, and Military Commission Vice Chairman Yang Shangkun expressed satisfaction with the reform program overall." Nevertheless, my colleague insisted that these "cuts" were not all that they appeared, and with the new reserve system, officers were actually being retained and increased in number. Godwin's comments on p.56 about the active reserves supports this contention. Godwin mentioned Japanese press reports which claimed that at least 20 active reserve divisions had already been formed by May, 1985. Therefore, I feel confident that my colleague's comments represent an accurate understanding of at least one interpretation of this picture. See the comments in the preceding footnotes about this interpretation.

⁶¹ Colonel Trevor Nevitt Dupuy, A Genius For War: The German Army and General Staff, 1807-1945, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1977).

⁶² Godwin, pp.54-55; his depiction in the chart and description approximates the structure depicted here.

in rank to the prefecture chief and the prefecture garrison commander. Next came the regimental commander, equivalent to the county head of government, and the county military department chief. After that came the battalion commander, and his equivalent was the commune chief and the commune military department head. Finally, the company commander followed, paralleling the production brigade chief and the production brigade's military department head.

From the division level down, PLA regular units utilized the triangular structure--three subordinate units for each level of command. So, a division had three regiments; regiments had three battalions; battalions had three companies; companies had three platoons; and platoons had three squads. Squads, unlike their American counterparts which had two fire teams, were broken into three teams.⁶³ The civilian command levels did not follow this rule strictly above the battalion/commune due to the varying numbers of brigades in communes, communes in counties, and so on. However, the concept was important, and was followed as closely as possible.

⁶³ John A. English, On Infantry, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981), p.171. Major English points out that the PLA even used the triangular structure within the squad during the Korean War, and probably earlier against the Japanese and KMT. In his estimation, this was extremely effective for the PLA. Also, Alexander George, The Chinese Communist Army in Action, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), pp.51-53; pp.27, 29, and 43-55 describe the intended effect of this organizational model. Also, Nelsen, "Organization," pp.74-75. This structure served mainly as the format for politically-oriented small group dynamics which cemented soldiers at all levels to the goals and values of the Party.

As can be seen in Figure 4, the PLA and civilian chains-of-command really represented two parallel columns, linked and held together rank-by-rank, which supported the central government and the CCP's control of the Peoples' Republic of China. In my colleague's estimation, they were most accurately considered two parallel systems, inseparably interwoven, the woof and warp which makes up the tapestry of Communist China. Therefore, he disagreed with Jonathan Pollack's evaluation of the PLA as a "state within a state."⁶⁴ During peacetime and in times of order, the two columns were somewhat separated, and the PLA did take on the appearance of an isolated entity; however, the interdependence of the two columns was never far from the forefront.⁶⁵

As should be clear by now, at each level of civilian government, the military bureau chief commanded militia units commensurate with his rank: production brigades commanded companies; communes commanded battalions; counties commanded regiments; prefectures commanded divisions; and provinces commanded all of the divisions belonging to their subordinate prefectures. The province also controlled any remaining local army units, as detailed above. Therefore, the provincial garrison commander was just like an army commander. In wartime, mobilized militia units

⁶⁴ Jonathan D. Pollack, "Structure and Process in the Chinese Military System," a paper prepared for a conference in the Spring, 1990, a copy of which was provided for me by Dr. Kenneth Lieberthal, who attended the conference.

⁶⁵ Compare Godwin's chart, p.66, with Figure 3; also, look at the Nelsen-Jencks chart in Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, p.179. All three basically illustrate the same structure of interlocking, mutually supporting civilian-military organizations.

not directed to support specific regular army units were simply incorporated under the garrison command's military structure. One could certainly agree with my colleague that the prospect of full mobilization in China is mind-boggling.⁶⁶

This chapter outlined the framework, politically and militarily, upon which the PLA rested in Chinese society. The PLA's mission, its highly political nature, its structure, and its juxtaposition to civilian society all served to illustrate Mao's decree:

*"Every communist must grasp the truth: Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." "Our principle is that the Party commands the gun and the gun will never command the Party."*⁶⁷

In the next chapter, I have examined the recruiting process and how the civil-military system inducted soldiers into the PLA.

⁶⁶ Gittings, p.209; Nelsen, "Organization," p.86.

⁶⁷ Franz Schurmann, Ideology and Organization in Communist China, (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1966, 1968), p.560.

CHAPTER TWO

Recruiting

2.1 Official classification and ranking system.

The PLA classified geographical locations, people, and units, assigning ranks to each in order to facilitate their recruiting campaigns.⁶⁸ The principle behind this classification system was to ensure that the PLA maximized the quality of its recruits--the cardinal factor considered in all recruiting activities. Classification stemmed from the historical experience of the PLA on

⁶⁸ I have found a relative scarcity of information about recruiting in the literature extant. Most authors merely discuss the conscription laws of 1954-55. Harvey Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, pp.18-21, discusses recruitment and demobilization very briefly, and his description of the system generally agrees with the one depicted here in this chapter. Alexander George, The Chinese Communist Army in Action, treats recruiting briefly on pp. 38-39, mainly involving the status of soldiers in the PLA vis-a-vis society; and again on pp.211-212, where he mentions the efforts to repair the breach between officers and troops in the 1960s, and he discusses the treatment of recruits in this context; on p. 212, he mentions the recruiting pool in the population-at-large and the PLA's selectivity due to the massive numbers. John Gittings, The Role of the Chinese Army, pp.148-152, discusses conscription and its voluntary nature, and the PLA's ability to pick the best candidates. He also mentions resistance to conscription due to economic hardships. Paul Godwin, The Chinese Communist Armed Forces, pp.90-91, says that recruiting information remains unclear. He does mention a report from Jilin province which mentions pre-selection procedures which may have been used; his terse description of this report clearly resembles the information detailed in this chapter. U.S. DIA's Handbook on the Chinese Armed Forces, (Washington: U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, July, 1976), pp.5-19 to 5-29, devotes three paragraphs to conscription, terms of service, and demobilization. Roxane D.V. Sismanidas, "Chapter 14: National Defense," in Robert L. Worden, et.al., editors, China: A Country Study (China Handbook), (Washington: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1988), pp.565-566, briefly discusses recruitment and conditions of service. As far as the system of classification is concerned, I find very little support in the literature, most of which has had to be extrapolated from discussions not directly pertaining to this subject.

the quality and reliability of soldiers from various regions; ideal body types desired by unit commanders--intelligence, strength and size being the desired attributes; and the missions of the various PLA units: whether they were field armies or local armies.

Geographical classification had very general rules for the nation as a whole, and became very specific in ranking prefectures. All prefectures in the PRC were ranked either first, second, or third class, which indicated the physical quality of soldiers coming from a certain prefecture based on objective and subjective criteria. The physical quality of the soldiers was the major consideration in the ranking of prefectures. The objective traits sought were: size--taller, bigger, and heavier; strength; and endurance. Subjectively, the PLA sought intelligent soldiers with good work habits and ethics who did not complain nor question orders. Economic, cultural, and demographic conditions shaped the use of objective criteria; PLA experience and Chinese military traditions influenced the subjective criteria.

In the most general terms, the following were the basic rules of classification for geographical areas:

- North China was considered higher than South China, and East China was better than the West;

- Cities had a higher ranking than the countryside (this will seem contradictory later; but the consideration here is physical type, not motivation);

- Border provinces ranked lower than China Proper.

Generally, areas were not ranked by province, but by

prefecture. Some provinces, such as Shandong, were given general classifications; Shandong was generally considered first class for the physical quality of soldiers found there. Guangdong province was ranked second class, but its cities were all first class. Cities in border provinces, whether in the Southwest or the Northwest, were ranked higher than their surrounding countrysides. The degree of economic, social, and cultural development in an area helped to determine the ranking of the area. The reasoning was simple: the better developed an area, the healthier, stronger, and more educated its soldiers. The average physical quality of young people, and economic development of an area were the main considerations in geographical classification.

In classifying people, there were only two categories: *putong bing*, or common soldiers; and *tezhong bing*, or special soldiers. *Putong bing* were only recruited as basic infantry troops. Their minimum height requirement was 1.55 meters; minimum weight was 90 *jīn*--roughly 45-50 kilograms. Theoretically, there were no education criteria; even illiterates qualified, although recruiters usually could pick and choose liberally, so this guideline was usually inflated unofficially. My colleague said that although no education was required, recruiters preferred a minimum of elementary school education; being able to discriminate liberally in their selections due to the overabundance of candidates, they rarely took illiterate recruits.⁶⁹ More *putong bing* than *tezhong bing* are recruited each year, mainly because the

⁶⁹ Nelsen, p.19.

bulk of recruits went to regular infantry units without many requirements for special troops.

Tezhong bing were recruited for the highest ranked infantry units, and all of the more technologically sophisticated types of units, like armor, air force, navy and artillery. The latter types of units automatically had priority on these recruits. Some infantry units also had priority on this category, such as my colleague's unit in the Beijing Military Region. The minimum height requirement for this category was 1.60 meters; there was no minimum weight requirement, the assumption being that the additional height carried a commensurate weight increment. Educationally, these recruits had to be graduates of *chuzhong*, or junior middle school.

The classification of military units was discussed in chapter one; I noted that three classifications were used to rank units. The benefits during recruiting were clear. First class units recruited only in first class prefectures, and received priority on *tezhong bing*. Second class units, in general, went to second class areas to recruit, but sometimes went to first class areas as well. Third class units generally recruited in the second class regions of China. Most of China was classified as first or second class; third class areas were very underdeveloped and underpopulated--Tibet and Xinjiang, for example--and did not support recruiting well, except in fulfilling quotas among minority peoples for political reasons.⁷⁰ Armies did not recruit solely in the

⁷⁰ Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, pp.192-193, and p.19.

provinces where they were stationed. Theoretically, in fact, a unit could have served in a particular province and never have recruited there, nor have any soldiers from that province.⁷¹ Furthermore, recruiting assignments differed each year, so that units did not recruit in the same areas for many years in a row; and their personnel no longer resembled the ethnically homogeneous units reported by Alexander George, but represented many different provinces and prefectures.

2.2 Recruiting procedure.

The parallel columns of civil-military government operated in excellent coordination in the recruitment process. The process began at the regimental level. Each year, each regiment estimated its need for new soldiers based on turnover projections. They reported this estimate to the division. The division then estimated its needs based upon the regimental reports. In turn, the division sent its estimate up to the army, which collated all of the requests from its subordinate divisions, then sent its estimate to the region command. The region commands sent their reports to the General Staff Department, where these estimates were totalled and given to the Central Military Committee.

The General Staff Department estimated the number of *putong*

⁷¹ George, pp.40-41, described ethnically homogeneous units, and their contributions to cohesion and morale in the PLA as a whole. However, he noted the inflexible nature of such a set up, and that it was forced upon the PLA, which was in transition when the Korean War started, due to the exigencies of the situation. Changes afterwards, including conscription, and memories of provincial warlordism most likely influenced the PLA against such a system.

bing and *tezhong bing* required, although they did not send this number to the CMC. Once they determined these figures at the general staff headquarters, they sent each district command the exact number of soldiers allowed to depart the military for that year. (Although recruits sign up for a specified period of time in their contracts, this period is always subject to change at the discretion of the general staff, based on a host of national security and other concerns.)⁷² They also told the region commands the number of recruits needed by each region command; and they gave these commands the list of provinces and prefectures in which their units were to recruit.

In other words, the figures sent up to the General Staff Department (GSD) from the PLA units were simply planning numbers for projecting the potential turnover of personnel; since the GSD decided the demobilization number, it also provided the required recruiting quota to each region. Also, since the GSD classified prefectures and PLA units, and determined the number of *putong bing* and *tezhong bing* required by each unit, handing down these quotas to PLA units, it ensured that first class units were sent to first class prefectures to recruit, second class units were sent to second class prefectures, and so on. The GSD centralized its control of recruiting in this way, and ensured that PLA units were dependent upon the Center for their personnel, and not on their host provinces and localities.

The GSD also told the region commands exactly how many

⁷² Gittings, The Role of the Chinese Army, p.150.

soldiers they could recruit from each prefecture. This number was fixed as an absolute limit. If a shortfall occurred on the number of recruits obtained, this number was to be reported, and the reason why; then a new area was provided for recruiting to meet the required numbers of soldiers. Such shortfalls, however, were rare; and they were not considered liabilities, as they were in the American recruiting system, because quality was the cardinal principle; poor quality of candidates was the main reason given for such shortfalls.

The region commands then parceled out the prefectures to their subordinate field and local armies, as well as the numbers of recruits required, and the number of soldiers to de-activate. Divisions received their proportional directions from the armies on the number of outgoing personnel, number of recruits, and the prefectures assigned for recruiting. Usually, a division was sent to one province per year for recruiting, but not always; sometimes they went to two or even three provinces if their needs were large enough. The decision was made by the army command.

Recruiters were sent out by either the division command or the army command; so the division was the lowest level to directly receive recruiting instructions. The division staff also coordinated the separation process for its subordinate regiments. Recruiters recruited for a division replacement pool, or an army replacement pool if the army command coordinated recruiting at its level. In recent years, there have been changes to more army-level recruiting than in the past--a move made probably to simplify the

recruiting process.

Recruiters were brought together in recruitment regiments, if coordinated at the army level, or recruitment battalions for division level recruiting activities. Division recruiting units varied in size, however; it was not uncommon for a division to form two recruiting battalions, or even form a recruiting regiment if its recruiting needs were great enough. When a division had recruiting needs like this, then it was often assigned more than one province in which to recruit, as I noted above. Recruiting units were temporary, organized for the recruiting mission and subsequent basic training.⁷³ Once the unit was formed, all of the recruiting personnel were brought together, and drilled for a week on recruiting techniques, regulations, and the unit's recruiting mission, quota, and target areas; they also received briefings on their roles as basic training instructors, and the basic training mission to be accomplished after recruitment.

This was the unique characteristic of the PLA recruiting system--the recruiters trained their recruits.⁷⁴ Furthermore, they trained new recruits for delivery to the recruiters' own units, and their recruiting mission ended when they delivered trained soldiers to the same divisions to which they belonged. This provided a

⁷³ DIA Handbook, p.5-25.

⁷⁴ Godwin, p.90, states that the military region provided basic training; DIA Handbook states that basic training was conducted at the regimental level. Both are incorrect. Basic training, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three, was administered by the recruiting unit, at the command level, army or division, which coordinated recruiting activities and organized the recruiting unit.

level of accountability which was not evident in the American system, which had a separate full-time recruiting command; American recruiters seldom had any contact with the units which received the soldiers they recruited, nor did they maintain contact with their recruits once the recruits departed for their basic training stations. Many a recruit in the American military nurtured visions of exacting revenge on their recruiters the first time they could get home on leave; and many a first sergeant, squad leader or company commander cursed the anonymous recruiters who sent them the occasional soldier with such obvious problems and disqualifications.

If brought together into a recruiting regiment at the army level, recruiters from the same divisions constituted a recruiting battalion which recruited solely for that division. Within the battalions, whether at the division or army level, each company was manned by personnel from the same regiment and recruited for that regiment. No further specialization occurred below this company-to-regiment level. Divisions retained the authority to determine how many soldiers went to any subordinate unit, so the company-to-regiment rule was not always carried out. As I said above, recruiters primarily filled the division's replacement pool.

When a regiment received an order to form a recruiting company, the missions was shared among the battalions and companies in that regiment. Usually, deputy commanders and deputy commissars filled the slots, along with some of the best soldiers from the companies. Sometimes, platoon leaders were also used as the

recruiting company's platoon leaders; at other times, squad leaders might even be used as platoon leaders. One of the two recruiting companies which my colleague commanded used this technique; these squad leaders were already identified as potential officers, so their capabilities were known to be excellent. At the regimental level and above, deputy bureau chiefs in the headquarters bureaus often served as recruiting battalion and regiment commanders, political commissars, or their deputies.

Divisions disbanded their recruitment battalions when these units delivered their newly trained soldiers to the division. An army level recruitment regiment disbanded when the subordinate recruiting battalions departed to deliver their soldiers to their parent divisions. The divisions then parcelled out the new soldiers based on needs in the regiments.

Just as the military "demand" side organized itself to obtain new recruits, the civilian "supply" side was also organized to facilitate the process of providing recruits.⁷⁵ The State Council--*guowuyuan*--sent the civilian governments at the provincial and prefectural levels the number of soldiers to be recruited from their areas. These numbers were derived from the figures initially supplied to the General Staff Department by the PLA units. These figures were broken down according to the *putong* and *tezhong bing* categories. The State Council also notified these governments exactly how many soldiers from a given province and prefecture were to be recruited by each region command. Therefore, the civilian

⁷⁵ Nelsen, p.19.

governments and military commands had exactly the same figures and instructions with which to work as they coordinated recruiting activities; each should have known exactly how many soldiers were to come out of each prefecture. They each had the means to cross-check to ensure that enough soldiers were produced, but not so many as to harm a prefecture which might have had a reputation for turning out excellent soldiers.⁷⁶

At the provincial level, the provincial garrison command was in charge of recruitment; each subordinate level's military organization likewise was charged with recruiting duties. The prefectures divided their quotas for each county. When recruiters began their missions, they reported to the provincial garrison command, which sent them to their assigned prefectures. At the prefecture garrison command, recruiters were assigned their counties, and the numbers that they were to recruit from each. The garrison commands based these numbers on the calculations that they made when they received their instructions from the State Council and provincial garrison command; these were the same figures that they gave to the county military departments.

Counties, in turn, divided up their numbers by commune or township; and these divided their quotas by the numbers of their production brigades, or villages. Recruiters, therefore, reported to each level's military organization to coordinate their missions.

⁷⁶ Godwin, p.90, states that the conscription regulations sought to minimize the effect of conscription on the national economy. Gittings, p.150, mentions exemptions allowed in the conscription laws due to hardships encountered by peasant families.

At each level, both recruiter and the military organization chief operated on the same information--the number of personnel assigned for recruitment by that recruiter from that local area. The process was very detailed and precise, and everyone involved knew exactly where the recruiter was to recruit, and how many soldiers a given recruiter could enlist from that area.

2.3 Recruiting process at the county level and below.

The discussion above explained how recruiters and civilian governments arrived at a mutual understanding of how many recruits were needed, and which services and units would show up to recruit in each prefecture, county, commune, and brigade. Generally, each year in October or November, the government announced its recruitment decree. The provinces, prefectures, and counties followed suit, making their announcements. This was the first stage of recruiting: *zhengbing dongyuan li*--the recruitment decree. After this decree, young people received political indoctrination and mobilization instruction (*zhengbing dongyuan*) for two to four weeks. The purpose was to inform the people that recruiting would soon begin; and it sought to impress young people with the reasons why they should serve in the PLA. They also heard about the recruiting laws, and the regulations and responsibilities governing recruiting.

The second stage was called *zhengbing dengji he tige jiancha*--the registration and physical examination stage. Military service was compulsory in China, but registration was actually voluntary because of the large numbers of people who desired to join the PLA.

The only exception to the voluntary rule occurred when a registration and recruiting shortfall happened, such as occurred during the latter stages of the Korean War.⁷⁷ Usually, at least three or four people registered for each slot required by the PLA.⁷⁸ If a person was rejected for military service one year, they could continue to register each year until they passed out of

⁷⁷ George, p.39.

⁷⁸ Actually, this 3 or 4 to 1 ratio appeared to be the number of recruits which were qualified after the medical and political examinations. The ratio of registrants seemed to be more like 10 to 1, or higher, for the 1950s, '60s, '70s. Nelsen, on p.20, states that 10% of the eligible candidates were actually conscripted. George, p.212, states that 750,000 recruits were required per year by the PLA, taken from the 6 million young men who reached the age of 18 each year. Actually, this was only one of five year groups within the targeted age range (18-22) recruited by the PLA. Edgar O'Ballance, The Red Army of China, (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), p.211, states that the potential recruiting pool was 50 million men per year. While this is probably inflated somewhat, it is actually closer to the mark than 6 million. The CIA's World Factbook 1989, (Washington: Central Intelligence Agency, May, 1989), p.62, lists the following figures:

Military manpower: Males 15-49, 325,072,512; 181,852,788 fit for military service; 12,259,483 reach military age (18) annually.

Assuming that 40% of the youth reaching military age were physically qualified (4,903,793)--DIA Handbook, p.5-21--and that half of these registered for the PLA (2,451,896 x 5 year groups), then in 1989, 12,259,480 youths theoretically were registered and qualified physically for the PLA. Eliminating another 20% for political reasons (2,451,896)--DIA Handbook, p.5-21--left 9,807,584 registered, qualified candidates, out of which PLA recruiters needed to select only 750,000 candidates per year. Reducing this theoretical 1989 figure by 50% to account for smaller populations in the 1960s and '70s, still left a figure between 4 and 5 million from which to recruit. My colleague's assertions that at least 3 to 4 candidates were available for every slot that he needed to fill actually seemed very conservative in light of these figures. The reason for this seeming discrepancy comes out later in this chapter in a discussion of the problems encountered by recruiters. See also, Gittings, p.149, and China Handbook, p.565.

the target age range of 18 to 22 years old. Since the units and recruiters coming in subsequent years were not the same, each year created completely new opportunities for selection. Selection depended mainly on the judgment of each individual recruiter; so the previous year bore very little influence on the next year's outcome.

The county military department and civil affairs department jointly administered the registration process. After registration, they set up several stations for medical examinations. These served one or more townships at a time. Physicians from local hospitals came to do the examinations. They were issued booklets which outline the standards for qualification and disqualification. These included height, weight, blood pressure, hearing, eyesight, strength, and so on. Registered young people came for their examinations on a prescribed schedule issued by the county. After the physicals, the county knew exactly the number of qualified candidates it had.⁷⁹ This process lasted approximately two to four

⁷⁹ Nelsen, p.19, describes this as an extremely strict procedure:

Perfect vision is required and men have been refused enlistment on such grounds as having hemorrhoids or too many fillings in their teeth.

The strictness of this procedure is similar to the examinations used by the Army to restrict the number of candidates for aviation training--flying helicopters--or the exams used by the military academies to reduce the number of applicants for admission. The strictest were the Air Force and Naval academies, because of their flight programs, particularly with eyesight requirements. Before I could enter West Point, I had to furnish proof that I had fillings emplaced in my molars for cavities that some military dentist discovered that I had, looking at X-rays sent to him in the mail. When I went to my family dentist, he put the fillings in,

weeks.

In the period from 1975-1977, when he performed recruiting duties in several counties, my colleague observed that after the physicals the ratio of qualified candidates to quotas was two or three to one, and usually the latter. He said that if the ratio in a county was only two to one, then recruiters usually felt very uncomfortable and worried about the quality of the soldiers that they would encounter there. He said that this feeling was not based on any experience that such a situation produced lower quality recruits; rather, it stemmed from self-interest: namely, wanting to come away with the best soldiers possible. So, the bigger the pool of candidates, the better a recruiter felt. He also said that counties outdid each other in competition to turn out the highest numbers of recruits to particularly good units--it was prestigious for the local area.⁸⁰ Also, county military

but told me that they weren't needed. One of my brothers was turned down for Marine aviation, after initially being selected, because a subsequent physical determined that his depth of vision no longer met their requirements. David Robinson, a star basketball player for the San Antonio Spurs, entered the Naval Academy just a fraction under their maximum height allowance. To the Academy's delight, he continued to grow, and became one of the premier college basketball players; but his height excluded him from many forms of naval service, such as submarines and flying naval aircraft.

⁸⁰ There is some debate about just how prestigious service in the PLA really was. During the economically depressed years, from the late 1950s until 1984-85, when life was particularly hard in the countryside, PLA service had obvious benefits. But traditionally in China, military service has been scorned and shunned by most, as is seen in the proverb: "Good iron does not make nails; good men do not make soldiers." The early years of the PRC and the past six or seven years indicate that the sentiment of this tradition has not left Chinese society; military service may actually be seen as the lesser of two evils, the greater being

departments did not like to fail in their mission of providing their quotas of soldiers to the PLA.

The third stage was *zhengshen he jiafang*--political examinations and household visits. This was an important stage--the first contact between the recruiter and the candidate. All of the recruiters working in a commune had the same list of

starvation or near-starvation in the countryside. If so, then self-interest as a motive for military service, as well as scorn for the military as a career, are common to both China and the U.S. Recent events surrounding the Persian Gulf War and the protestations that many service members were only in the military either to earn education credits or because they could not earn a living in their hometowns--and they certainly did not expect to have to go to war!--illustrate this concept. My parents met a lady at my graduation from West Point who had a son who had graduated a few years earlier. She told them the following anecdote: In her town there was one particularly prominent family, whose daughter took a liking to this lady's son. When the son was a junior, he was home on Christmas leave, and was doing some last minute shopping with his mother, when they met the matron of this prominent family. When she heard that the young man was a West Point cadet, she became very interested in him for her daughter's sake, and invited the whole family to a posh New Year's Eve party. Nothing developed between the son and this lady's daughter, and the families drifted apart. Later, after he had graduated, his mother met the other lady again, who politely asked what her son was doing. When she replied that he was a lieutenant in the Army, the other woman, obviously appalled, asked, "What?! Couldn't he find a job after graduating from West Point!"

The story illustrates the traditionally distant relationship between American society and its military; this type of relationship appears to be the same in China, as well. See George, pp.39-40, for a discussion of the CCP's efforts to make military service more attractive to Chinese society; again on pp.212-213, he talks about the attitude of the younger generations towards the revolutionary ideology and the PLA in the 1960s. Gittings, pp.151-152, talks about the resistance in society to conscription. For a recent evaluation of Chinese society's attitude towards the PLA, see the series of articles in Jane's Special Report: China in Crisis, the Role of the PLA, (Somerset, U.K.: Jane's Information Group, Ltd, 1989). Of particular interest to this topic are the articles by Jonathan Mirsky, "Revenge of the Old Guard," and Paul Beaver and Bridget Harney, "The Role of the PLA in Tiananmen Square."

candidates. Each recruiter visited each of the young people in their homes; this was where competition between recruiters occurred. My colleague recalled his first recruiting experience in one county in 1975, where he encountered recruiters from two other army units, plus a navy recruiter who sought five men. Recruiters did not bargain amongst themselves for particular recruits, although they did meet together and exchange information and experiences occasionally.

The household visits served three purposes. First, the recruiter visited and interviewed the family members and got a feeling for the recruit's background. Second, the recruiter formed an impression of the recruit. Finally, the recruiter tried to influence the recruit so that he wanted to join the recruiter's unit. The county military department conducted the political examination and family background check. This became a resource available to the recruiters, in case there were any questions remaining in the recruiter's mind about a recruit. Recruiters also talked with the village leaders where the recruit and his family lived. Except for this person, recruiters did not talk to anyone besides the recruit, his family, and personnel in the military departments. This third stage took three to four weeks.

During the household visits, recruiters asked a series of questions and tried to ascertain several pieces of information. First, were the recruits really volunteers; second, was the family enthusiastic about his potential service; third, what was the family economic background--could they afford to lose the son's

income and labor; fourth, the recruit's family and class background; and what kind of pressures and leverage were available, in the form of family influences, to ensure that the recruit served well in the PLA. A typical interview question series might have gone something like this:

(1) Why do you want to serve in the PLA? (2) Do you think you can handle the rigors of life in the PLA? Are you disciplined enough to follow orders without complaining or asking questions? (3) What's your ultimate purpose in joining? (4) Does your family support you in this decision? (5) (To parents) Will you have any severe financial difficulties if he joins? (6) Have you willingly volunteered to suffer financially if he joins the PLA? (7) I noticed on your political examination that your Uncle Gao Mingming disappeared for four years during the Civil War; do you know what he was doing during that time? Could he have been fighting for the KMT? (8) Do you have a fiancée? How does she feel about you joining the PLA? Can she wait for you to return? What was her father doing in Shanghai during the anti-Japanese war?

One of the objectives of his questioning was to determine exactly what the recruit's motives were in joining. Although recruiters all knew that peasants basically joined the PLA in order to improve their economic status, a blatant attitude about this was frowned upon. Recruits needed to impress the recruiter that their desire to join involved more than pure self-interest. Recruiters used a mixture of patriotism, honor, and economic incentives to impress a recruit and his family; this was another major objective of the household visit: trying to discover the right mixture of incentives which would persuade the candidate to opt for the recruiter's unit. The family often gave the recruiter the best clues with which to proceed.

Families with sons in the military were called *junshu*--

military families. For some families, having sons in the PLA was the hallmark of their life in their village. It was common to find families with more than one son who had served in the PLA. However, only one son could be recruited in a give year, and brothers never served in the same units. Usually, only one or two sons were in the military age range at the same time. My colleague said that he did not notice any tendency towards keeping the oldest son, or youngest son, out of the PLA, while the other went into the military. He recruited candidates across the spectrum.

The real dividing line for true military families in the Western fashion, or even in the traditional Chinese fashion, came when a member of the family became an officer, and eventually made his way up the ranks to the regimental level. At that point, he could retire as a career officer, and receive a pension, as well as another government job. One's children, at this point, had a much greater chance of being selected for the PLA, and even for the officer ranks themselves. These families lived on PLA bases, and their children attended schools staffed and run by the PLA.

Once a recruiter was satisfied that a recruit was a good prospect, he tried to influence the recruit to join his unit. One technique was to win over the boy's family. Although it was forbidden to tell a recruit where a unit was located, recruiters did tell recruits the benefits of the unit: its technological aspects, which often translated into good civilian jobs afterwards; the type of unit and the prestige of being in it; unit history; if the recruiter came from a unit with special characteristics, like

my colleague, then he might have mentioned that life was better in that unit than in the typical PLA unit.

Recruiters never promised candidates that they would perform a particular job, or have any certain duties. They usually outlined the most interesting duties; but they were sure to caveat their remarks with statements that no guarantees about any type of duties could be made before a recruit completed basic training. Recruiters also were very careful not to take any recruits whose absence would clearly cause their families to suffer unacceptable economic hardships. This was a hard thing to determine, and probably caused the most problems with recruiting.

In 1976, my colleague recruited in a commune in a certain county, and ran across a particularly appealing candidate: tall, good-looking (which was important in the Beijing Military Region), intelligent, motivated, and from a good background. The recruit wanted to join his unit, also; so, he thought that he had the situation well in hand. However, the commune military department suddenly told him that the recruit could not be recruited, because that would cause undue hardship to his family, which, in turn, would cause undue hardship to the village and commune. The county military department would not reverse the commune's decision, although he approached the county military department chief several times about the matter. He felt certain that the boy's village leader had swayed the commune military department chief and the county military department chief against allowing the candidate to leave for the army. The village leader's *guanxi* and status in the

local area triumphed over his more temporal status and relationships, in spite of the prestige of his unit and the PLA.

This case illustrated an important problem area in recruiting. As I demonstrated in a footnote above about the manpower pool, actual ratios between completely qualified candidates and quotas required should have approached ten to one. However, my colleague reported that he usually faced ratios of three or four to one. Recruiting campaigns were expensive for the civilian governments at county, commune and brigade levels. The greatest expenses revolved around the physical examinations. Buildings had to be rented, along with the costs for heating, since recruiting campaigns were always conducted in the winter. Counties had to hire doctors to perform the exams; and these had to be housed in hotels or inns.

Therefore, most counties actually performed the political examinations first in order to eliminate as many registrants as possible. Next, economic analyses were conducted to identify any recruits whose service constituted too large an economic burden on their families, thereby burdening the local government as well. The recruit mentioned in the example above somehow slipped through this facet of the elimination process. Only after these were conducted, and the number of registrants pared down to a more feasible level, did the county hold the physical examinations. The physicals trimmed the number of candidates further, as noted. These techniques helped local governments save money and cut costs; but they caused recruiters problems sometimes because the ratio was trimmed down to a lower level.

One year, he went to a county where he was assigned three communes. In the first two, the ratios approached 2.8 to 1, which he felt was satisfactory. But the third was barely 2.1 to 1, and he was dissatisfied. He spoke to the commune military department chief, but the situation did not improve. So, he rejected the entire commune, and demanded that the county provide another location. The replacement site's ratio approached four to one, and he was satisfied with the outcome. But these strategies utilized by the local governments explained the gap between the potential manpower pool available to recruiters, and the realities encountered in the counties.

The political background check was still very important during the time that my colleague recruited. The mid-1970s, when he spent three years as a recruiter, were still within the period called the Cultural Revolution. Youth from the cities were "sent down" to the countryside throughout this period. My colleague stated that many of these youths registered for service in the PLA, which they were allowed to do, because the living conditions in the countryside tended to be so desperate, and the PLA offered a vast improvement. He said that he did not recruit many such youths, but many did manage to enter the PLA, probably because of their higher education levels and generally better physical condition. In fact, a friend of his was sent to Inner Mongolia as a teen; she quickly volunteered for the PLA to escape the harsh conditions of that existence. She was selected, and eventually was sent to a medical school, where she became a PLA doctor.

The final stage was *jueding*--making decisions. The recruiters made their decisions on which candidates to sign up for their units. Of course, there are certain outstanding candidates who had several recruiters seeking to sign them up. In this regard, the PLA recruiting system resembled the recruiting system used by American colleges and universities to obtain star high school athletes for their football and basketball teams. Competition and compromise were involved here. Each recruiter made up his "wish" list, which he turned over to the commune military department. There was always some overlap on recruiters' wish lists, due to these outstanding candidates. Each recruiter, in addition to his efforts with the recruit and the recruit's family, tried to persuade the military department to favor his wish list.

Several factors affected each case in this situation: (1) **The type of unit.** If one unit was a special type of unit which had priority for *tezhong bing*, then it was favored over a unit which did not have this priority. In the example mentioned above concerning the unsatisfactory recruiting ratio, my colleague based his rejection of the deficient commune on the fact that the military department chief would not guarantee that he received the first pick on every candidate. Since his unit recruited only *tezhong bing*, he should have had priority on all recruits fitting into that category. (2) **The will of the recruit.** He usually got the unit of his choice. (3) **The recruit's family and their wishes.** This was especially important when the family had excellent relations with the military department. For example, my colleague

knew of a case in which a county leader wanted his son to serve in the navy, because of the perceived benefits of such service over infantry or other ground forces duty; he used his *guanxi* and influence to persuade the county military department chief to help out his son. So, the county military department chief sent the navy recruiter to the county leader's township, where he was directed to the young man, and persuaded to select him. In the meantime, the county leader learned that the air force was a better option for his son, and that the air force recruiter was interested in him. He then asked the county military department chief to change the wish list, which he did arbitrarily, and the son went off to the air force.

(4) Special privilege of units, based upon their prestige. My colleague rarely encountered any difficulty in acquiring an acceptable wish list, because his unit was part of the Beijing Military Region, which carried a lot of prestige. **(5) Accepting less-qualified candidates from the military departments which were not on the recruiter's wish list.** This came into the picture when some family in the commune had prevailed upon the military department to work out some arrangement for a son to serve in a prestigious or urban-based unit; it involved compromise on the part of the recruiter and the military department. If a recruiter accepted a recruit like this, he often received the rest of his wish list *en toto*. **(6) Relations between the recruiter and the**

military department--*guanxi*.⁸¹ This was probably the single most important factor. *Guanxi* was developed through personal contacts and time spent together. It was especially important when two units were equal and the recruit did not get his choice. The main difference between items (5) and (6) was that *guanxi* took time to develop, and was cultivated throughout the recruiting period by recruiters and the military departments; the example in item (5) was often influenced by *guanxi*, and would affect future relations between the recruiter and the military department, but it was also something which could be worked out simply as a business-like proposition and did not require the cultivation of relationships and the mutually friendly feelings associated with *guanxi*.

In 1977, my colleague established a recruiting company utilizing three platoon leaders from his parent battalion and several senior soldiers from his own infantry company as squad leaders. The regiment provided several other officers and soldiers, so that the recruiting company had the full complement of leadership--commander and deputy commander, political commissar and deputy commissar, three platoon leaders, logistics officer, and nine squad leaders--seventeen in all. In effect, the unit was a cadre structure, and their mission was to fill it with recruits. When this full unit returned to conduct basic training, logistics support was provided by the command level which had coordinated and

⁸¹ For a full treatment of this subject, see Lucian W. Pye, The Mandarin and the Cadre, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Center for Chinese Studies, 1988), pp.86-88; also, Andrew Walder, Communist Neo-Traditionalism, (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1986), pp.26, and 176-185.

organized the recruiting mission; therefore, the recruiting unit did not contain a logistics/cooking squad in its structure.

He had three counties to work in, and a quota of one hundred fifty recruits. He sent one platoon of four men to each county, then the platoon leaders sent squad leaders to one or more communes each. The platoon leaders worked directly with their squad leaders, and held regular meetings with all of them. Before the decision-making stage, the squad leaders met with their platoon leaders for final approval. If a platoon leader had a large quota of recruits, then the commander got involved with the decision-making process. Otherwise, the platoon leader had a lot of autonomy, since he was the one working directly with the commune military departments within his county.

As the company commander, he traveled around, working as a troubleshooter, inspecting his soldiers' progress, and meeting with military departments to establish *guanxi*. He said that no presents, money, cigarettes, or other items which might be considered bribes were exchanged. Perhaps, he said, this was done on the civilian side by families trying to influence military departments prior to or during the recruiting process to improve their son's chances for a good assignment, but he denied the suggestion that the PLA participated in this sort of activity. When I pressed him on this point, he bluntly stated that the PLA, during the mid-1970s when he was a recruiter, held all of the advantages in the recruiting relationship: an abundance of candidates; the option to reject a whole commune's candidates and

demand that a new location be provided from the county for recruiting purposes; and all the benefits PLA service offered recruits economically and politically. Thus, he claimed, the PLA recruiter did not need to stoop to such methods in order to accomplish his mission.

He allowed that meals were exchanged, and said that recruits' families always lavished recruiters with special food and liquor during household visits; but this was merely a reflection of culture, everyone did it, and no discernible advantage accrued from these events. Instead, he was developing the relationships between himself, the recruits and their families, and the military department chiefs, and re-enforcing the relationships that his subordinate leaders had already developed. *Guanxi*, an intangible element, was extremely important in the recruiting process, and made significant tangible contributions to a recruiter's success.

Once the wish lists were approved and finalized, the commune sent them to the county military department. The county military department verified and approved the final decision. Then it was forwarded to the prefecture garrison command; the prefecture approval was merely a rubber stamp.⁸² The county military

⁸² Jean C. Oi, State and Peasant in Contemporary China, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp.60-61; describes this "rubber-stamp" function of the prefecture and higher levels in approving lower level grain quotas. Her discussion of the "Struggle over the Surplus [of grain]," Chapter 3, is pertinent to the discussion here because her description of the grain quota process seems, to me, to closely resemble this recruiting process; and may, therefore, shed more light on the kinds of problems, negotiations, strategies, and solutions which occurred on the civilian side of this recruiting process.

department and civil affairs department settled any unresolved disputes among the recruiters and the commune military department. The county was the last level where the recruiter could appeal the final form of his wish list. My colleague experienced a favorable turnaround on an appeal at the county level once when he was not satisfied with the outcome at the commune. He only received a fraction of his wish list at the commune level, so he appealed to the county military department, where he had spent considerable time cultivating relationships. The prestige of his unit was better known at that level also; as a result, he received the full complement of recruits that he had requested on the list.

The county sent each recruit a certificate in the name of the Defense Ministry, informing him that he had been selected by a particular unit. They were also told when and where to go for transportation to the new unit for basic training. Instructions enclosed with the certificate also instructed the recruit when and where to go to receive his uniforms. These were issued by the commune or county military departments before basic training, not the PLA units.

The PLA produced the uniforms in their own factories. My colleague said that several hundred of these existed while he was on active duty. Each military region had its own factories and logistics system which produced uniforms and other necessities for the military region. Recruiters obtained the sizes of their recruits during the household visits or from the local military departments. Once their wish lists were finalized, and the

recruiting mission was fulfilled, the logistics officer requisitioned the uniforms from the army or division providing logistics support. When these were received by the logistics officer, he sent them to the counties to be issued to the recruits.

Uniforms were standardized in appearance nationwide; but variations in padding and texture occurred, based on the climatic conditions found in the military region. Summer uniforms and shoes generally were standardized nationwide; but the winter uniforms varied a great deal, as did the footwear. Fur-lined boots and shoes were common in the north, west, and northwest regions of China; lined cotton shoes were found in Central China; and simple cotton shoes were normal in the south. His unit, as part of the Beijing Military Region, was an exception to the rule. They wore black leather shoes and boots, with fur linings for the winter uniforms; and this footwear had to be spit-shined, as was the custom in the American Army. He said that the Beijing Military Region was on display to the rest of the world, due to its location; so, their appearance needed to be a cut above the rest. While the rest of the PLA generally wore cotton uniforms summer and winter--padded or fur-lined as climatic conditions dictated--the Beijing Military Region wore wool and wool-mix uniforms (possibly like gabardine, which is common in the U.S. Army's uniforms), because these look better.

This was similar to my experience in the Third Infantry in Washington, D.C. Our soldiers wore special headgear, uniforms and shoes; we always wore winter weight--100% wool--uniforms, even in

the heat of the summer, because the humidity of Washington's summers quickly soaked the crisp creases out of the mixed-wool summer weight uniforms, so that we looked like drenched cats after a prolonged period of time in anything other than pure wool, which always held its crease, excepting in a thunderstorm!

The whole recruiting process lasted two to three months.⁸³ New recruits generally arrived in their new units for basic training in January, or at the end of December. Service time was calculated from January 1st of the year they enter (although in some years, February 1st was the date used since recruiting started later in those years.) The whole process was very involved, and required a lot of manpower. It provided another piece of evidence that the PLA was mainly a defensive army concerned with internal relationships with the Chinese people. Such a system could not possibly work for a force like the U.S. Army, since so many of its units were deployed overseas, and necessarily maintained a high level of readiness throughout the year. The civilian government functions carried out in China seemed inconceivable in the U.S. as a part of the recruiting process. Thus, there were benefits, as well as disadvantages, in both systems, and each seemed suited to the military system it served.

In the next chapter, we will begin with the new recruits in basic training, and go on to take a look at life for an enlisted soldier in the PLA. We will see that although life in the PLA was

⁸³ DIA Handbook, p.5-21: "Induction normally takes place during the slack period of agriculture, generally from November to February."

very spartan by American standards, yet it was a very enviable and coveted lifestyle for the peasants who made up the bulk of China's population.

CHAPTER THREE

Now we were standing in the middle of the drill field. It was painfully obvious that Corporal Blaskewitz was ashamed of us. He was evidently embarrassed to be seen with us. In his eyes we were lepers drenched by the sun, our civilian clothing moist and dirty, our shoes full of sand, our long hair blowing in the hot, sea air. "When you march, you step off on your left foot." He allowed this announcement to sink in. "When I give the command, 'Fa-werrrd, humphff,' you step off smartly on your left foot...but not until I say 'humphff.'" He eyed us carefully, his shoulders square, head up, chin in, heels together and feet at a forty-five degree angle. He spat and shifted his wad of tobacco to the other cheek. A sardonic, evil expression passed over his face. We had learned to watch his expression intently, trying to divine his innermost thought in time to employ any tactic we could to prevent ourselves from being made complete fools.

"Lift up your left foot." We did. He walked slowly down the front rank. He paused. "Do you have your left foot on a different side from other folks?" he asked a tall, heavily built boot. "No, sir!" "Then that must be your right foot?" "Yes, sir!" "Why do you have it high in the air? Are you a bird?" "No, sir!" "That is not your left, left, left foot; that's your right, right, right foot!!" "Yes, sir!" "Don't you know your right from your left?" "No, sir!" "Get your left foot up." The boot did. "Remember which is which, stupid."

We listened to this exchange in terror. Did we have the left foot up, or not? I glanced down. Yes. I had my left foot up. I gave silent thanks to my public school system. I knew the difference between right and left.

Corporal Blaskewitz moved on. He found four more wrong feet in the air. Each discovery was greeted by him as something new and astonishing. No one would ever have guessed he had ever seen anyone before who had made that error, so great was his surprise. He discussed it with each sweating fumbler. Meanwhile, the rest of us stood with our feet up. It was a very tiring position. We began to wish everyone in the world knew right from left; we thought about how easy it would be to learn this lesson...learn it early in life...and be done with it.

But life is not as easy as that. Life is a long, painful education in little things. It is learning and relearning of simple matters; first as children, then through every stage of life. The great, important things children know instinctively are lost to older persons, lost in the complex maze of being grown. Children know a friend on sight, but cannot tell why; kindness and goodness to them have an aura and they see it and recognize it and accept it as a natural order of life; but adults must grope for the simple enduring values slowly, suspiciously seeking them, often afraid to embrace them or recognize them when they are within their presence. And children can forgive, can laugh and cry over things that matter. And can feel and see and taste the goodness and sweetness of life for they have the wonder and breathlessness of

faith in the mystery of life for good...in its power to produce all the wonders of their imaginations. And as they grow older a sadness comes over them. They cannot explain it, but it is a deep and abiding sadness that witnesses the breakup of lifelong ties and affections and friendships. The cords of childhood are slowly broken one by one, as the years pass and new relationships are formed and the wonder that is of childhood fades into the mysteries of memory.

The pulsations of life are unending processes of such forces of learning and relearning of simple things. Elementary things that mean life and death. There comes a time when elementary things must be learned as if they were entirely new and strange. They must be learned because the spark of being resides in them. A man who does not know his right from his left can cause the death of hundreds of men who do know this simple thing. Unless everyone is clear on which is his right and which is his left, a battle could be lost, or a squad, or a gun position. Such knowledge of little things must be right and instinctive, not subject to hesitation or indecision, not subject to thought.

Corporal Blaskewitz was probing for these weaknesses; the small simple things that were wrong. He must find them and correct them. Our lives depended on it. He knew from the thousands of men he had faced on this drill field that in each platoon of them more than one or two, sometimes a half a dozen, would not know their right foot from their left. It was a serious matter, not easily corrected. It takes time and firmness to change a thought pattern that has been wrong since the beginning of life. He would pound away about feet, until when the final day came, when boots were made into Marines, they would know which was right and which was left. We held up our feet.

--Grady T. Gallant, On Valor's Side

Enlisted Soldiers

3.1 Basic Training.

Basic training was conducted either at the army or division level.⁸⁴ For some specialized units, such as an anti-aircraft regiment, training was conducted at that unit's level.⁸⁵ In the basic training company, platoon leaders had recruited their platoon members, and the senior soldiers acting as squad leaders had recruited their squad members. Therefore, the relationships

⁸⁴ Godwin, p.90.

⁸⁵ DIA Handbook, p.5-25, section 5-44.

between soldiers and their trainers were very good. The recruiting process and certain characteristics of Chinese culture fostered this cohesion; an illustration from personal experience will help to demonstrate why this was so.

When my colleague was a recruiter, he regularly planned only one to two hours for each household visit; invariably he stayed much longer. The recruit's family filled him with their best food, and a lot of baijiu--Chinese "moonshine" or local brew--was consumed. (My colleague stated that this was sometimes a problem because of the busy schedule and the number of recruits to be seen in a day, perhaps as many as five in a day. During the month of household visits, he estimated that he averaged a liter of baijiu per day.) Recruiters were usually given the red carpet treatment by the families; especially warm relationships developed between the families of soldiers and the recruiters who actually selected and trained their children. When parents came to visit their children, they inevitably brought gifts of food and produce for the recruiter. These relationships continued long into the future, even after the soldiers left the military. He said that even ten years later, as a graduate student in Beijing, some parents of his former soldiers and recruits remembered him, and treated him warmly, sending gifts to him through their children who were still serving in the PLA. They respected him and trusted him to take good care of their sons; and they expressed appreciation for his responsibilities. This type of background created the closeness and cohesion which he said was typical of both basic training and

regular units.

Despite the good feelings and trust fostered between the new soldiers and their recruiters-turned-trainers, the first two weeks were extremely stressful for the recruits. Shock and confusion typified the common experience of recruits in any army; the PLA was no exception.⁸⁶ The process of becoming a soldier was tough. Physical training in the PLA was much more rigorous than the typical American basic training unit. Recruits ran an average of three miles per day, along with various calisthenics, which was not unusual for American units. However, PLA training units placed maximum emphasis on the ability to march very long periods in full

⁸⁶ I have experienced this on both sides of the picture: Cadet Basic Training at West Point was extremely stressful. For the first three weeks, we were not allowed near telephones, nor were we allowed to resign during that period. Prior to going to basic training, I had been preparing extremely hard for it physically, running an average of 80 miles per week, doing pushups, pullups, and situps every day. Within a week of arriving, I could not do half the number of pullups or pushups I was doing daily at home; runs of three or four miles were suddenly difficult; and I lost eleven pounds in two weeks. I hated the place, the experience, I felt ready to quit and return to obscurity in Montana. Then, one morning during the third week, I awoke before the firing of the reveille cannon and stood at my window, staring at a barge steaming up the misty Hudson River in the dim, ethereal, pre-dawn light; and I learned to love West Point, and I determined to graduate from there regardless of the price I had to pay. Two years later, I worked as a drill cadet at Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri, in a regular army basic training company, and I observed first hand the shock of civilian boys coming to grips with the fact that they were really "in the Army now." There is a humbling quality to this scene as one watches them lose their hair, clothing, and other elements which marked them as separate individuals; their former identities suddenly vanishing in the wake of military authority, precision, and power. It is an event which can be described, yet which must be felt and experienced to be fully appreciated. For two very poignant accounts of basic training (boot camp), see: Leon Uris, Battle Cry, and T. Grady Gallant, On Valor's Side. For another nation's perspective on this ordeal, see Erich Maria Remarque's All Quiet On The Western Front.

combat gear. The typical training goal was to be able to march twenty-five to thirty miles a day at a standard rate of three miles per hour for an indefinite number of days. PLA experiences in the Long March, the Japanese War, and the Korean War probably influenced this training emphasis.⁸⁷ Sometimes marches of forty to fifty miles within a twenty-four hour period were required.⁸⁸

⁸⁷DIA Handbook, pp.3-26 and 3-27, sections 3-111, and 3-116 to 3-120.

⁸⁸ John A. English, On Infantry, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981), p.69. Major English, a Canadian Army officer, provides the following commentary on the Wehrmacht which the reader can use by way of comparison:

The training of the new German army prior to World War II was as intensive physically as it was intellectually. In spite of the importance attached to tanks and planes, the marching ability of infantry was not neglected. Many German units were capable of astonishing feats in this area, and 30 miles a day for several days on end appears to have been a fairly common training practice. A good rate for a longer march was considered to be an impressive four to five kilometers an hour [two-and-a-half to three miles per hour]. Equally important, however, was that more than six kilometers [per hour] was considered impossible. The Germans were not afraid to admit to human limitations.

My own experience training a platoon for long-distance marching competitions in 1984, while assigned to the 3rd Infantry Division in Germany, verifies this as an exceptional attainment. We trained for three-and-a-half-months, and marched 700 miles en route to participating in the prestigious Nijmegen, Holland marches: a four-day, 100-mile event which drew thousands of military and civilian marchers from around the world. Our best performance during this training period was a two day competition for the division championship: we turned in a time of six hours, seven minutes for 25 miles the first day, followed by a second day of 27 miles in six hours, fifty-two minutes. As a drill cadet in a basic training company in 1979, we never took our troops on a march longer than twelve miles, and we accomplished that in six hours. The Army's Expert Infantryman competition includes a 12-mile forced march as one of the events; candidates needed to cover the distance in less than three hours in order to qualify for the Expert Infantryman's Badge.

The other basic skills drilled into recruits included *duilie xunlian*--basic soldiering skills, such as saluting, the wearing of uniforms, drill and ceremony. For the first two weeks, this was all that soldiers did; my colleague told me that it was very arduous. Marksmanship--*sheji*; bayonet training--*cisha*; grenades--*toudan xunlian*; and fortifications, engineering, foxholes, minefields--*tugong zuoye*--were the main forms of combat training taught to the recruits. The other form of training given to recruits was *zhengzhi jiaoyu*--political education.

Although, recruits used live ammunition for marksmanship and grenade training, it could not be considered ample by any standard. In regular rifle companies, soldiers performed live marksmanship training three times per year, and grenade training once a year. During the first period of training, each soldier fired approximately ten rounds, at targets one hundred meters distant, utilizing the standing firing position. In the second phase, each soldier fired fifteen to thirty rounds, usually averaging twenty rounds, at one hundred and one hundred fifty meter targets, utilizing standing and kneeling firing positions, respectively. On the final round of firing, soldiers again fired fifteen to thirty rounds, usually averaging twenty rounds, at targets one hundred, one hundred fifty, and two hundred meters distant. The firing position for this last distance was the prone supported firing position.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ These were the standard firing positions used in the U.S. Army; in addition, and most commonly used, was the foxhole supported firing position, in which a soldier stood in a foxhole

and leaned against the forward edge of the hole, resting his hand on a sandbag adjusted to give him maximum support for his weapon. Each of these positions lent varying degrees of support (and, therefore, accuracy) to the firer as he tried to aim carefully at his target, controlled his breathing, maintained his sight picture, and held his weapon steady while he squeezed the trigger gently to avoid jerking the weapon's barrel, thereby ruining his aim. The farther the target, the greater was the necessity for support; one hundred meters was a fairly easy target; two hundred much more difficult. One aspect of the Chinese gunnery system which would seem a glaring omission to American soldiers or Marines was that they did not have enough ammunition to zero their weapons before they shot for an official qualification record. Zeroing allowed the firer to adjust the sights on his weapon to match his own vision of the target as seen through the sights on the weapon. In my company we usually allowed a maximum of fifteen rounds per man for this process; the average was nine to twelve rounds--a good marksman could zero in six rounds. These nine to fifteen rounds per man would have used up the entire supply of ammunition allotted for the first phase of gunnery training in the PLA. One could surmise from this evidence that either the PLA did not place much emphasis on marksmanship, or that their "dry fire" training techniques--breathing control, sight alignment, squeezing the trigger gently enough that a coin did not fall off the tip of the barrel when the firing pin struck the firing chamber--were exceptionally well developed among their senior soldiers and officers; these personnel had to be able to effectively train recruits and new soldiers, so that they did not suffer from this dearth of training ammunition. The latter seemed to be the case, since the PLA claimed to be the best army in the world in close combat--a tough claim to make if their soldiers could not hit their targets. The example of the U.S. Marine Corps lent some support to the latter theory; often when they went to the rifle range, they encamped for two weeks or more; and they did not even fire their weapons during the first week of training at the range, initially concentrating on every aspect of the rifle, all of the firing techniques listed above, windage and the drift of the round as it travels down-range, target pictures, and the capabilities of the rounds being fired; they emphasized making every rifleman an expert marksman. I, personally, would consider the average marksman in the Marine Corps superior to his counterpart in the U.S. Army, despite the fact that the Marines, too, generally fired less rounds than American infantry soldiers, though they were not limited to the degree that the PLA was. In contrast, my battalion commanders looked askance at my training schedules when I allotted more than two days for marksmanship training; and they expected to see all of my weapons listed as training events: machine guns, grenade launchers, hand grenades, rifles, Light Anti-tank Weapons (LAWs), and even shotguns and pistols; in addition, they also expected to see additional basic skills classes such as Nuclear-Biological-

Additionally, during unit field exercises, soldiers also fired ten to twenty rounds once or twice per year. On average, each soldier fired a total fifty to seventy rounds per year in three to four exercises. Machine gun crews fired one hundred to two hundred rounds, and each soldier threw one live hand grenade per year. Basic training recruits fired approximately twenty rounds total, and threw one live hand grenade. Units also used blank ammunition for tactical training exercises, but this, again, was in very limited quantities. The following account epitomized the critical shortage of training ammunition in PLA units:

A hero of a border defense unit during the 1969 clashes with the USSR reported that he had never previously heard the sound of artillery and had only once engaged in target practice.⁹⁰

By way of comparison, my company threw live hand grenades once a year, and each soldier threw six to ten grenades. We had three periods of marksmanship training, two for practice and one for record qualification with our weapons. The standard firing table

Chemical warfare training, field artillery fire-direction techniques, and other topics which had nothing to do with marksmanship. Each of these classes required NCO or officer instructors; and each weapon required a separate firing range, which drained off my instructor manpower and expertise in the form of range safety officers, officers-in-charge of the ranges, ammunition details, and other support personnel and functions. We simply could not afford to thoroughly emphasize marksmanship to the exclusion of all other activities, because training time and facilities were limited. We made up for this shortcoming through a fairly abundant supply of ammunition, which allowed us to concentrate our limited time and sparse marksmanship instructors on the personnel requiring the most attention in order to qualify with their weapons. Obviously, the PLA did not have this luxury.

⁹⁰ Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, p.247, note 13; from Peking Review, June 20, 1969, p.141.

was forty-two rounds for qualification, and each soldier fired this table at least three times per year, plus additional practice rounds and zeroing rounds. Therefore, each of my soldiers fired, on average, one-hundred fifty to two hundred rounds per year with their rifles just in marksmanship training, plus rounds fired with additional weapons such as the forty millimeter grenade launcher, machine gun, Light Anti-tank Weapon (LAW), shotguns, and pistols. We also had opportunity to set up and detonate various demolitions and mines.

This training on the firing ranges prepared my soldiers for live fire training exercises involving their whole units. Each squad negotiated a combat assault course with live ammunition down a lane with numerous objectives, capped with a quickly consolidated defense against an enemy counter-attack. Then the whole company prepared a defensive position, including live fire support from the battalion mortar platoon, during which each man, machine gun crew and other special weapons expended hundreds of rounds against a series of targets representing a deliberate, sustained assault by an enemy force. In this single engagement, which climaxed our training year, each man easily fired the equivalent rounds that their PLA counterparts fired in an entire training year.

Political commissars in the recruiting units were involved in all recruiting and training activities, as were the deputy commander and the deputy commissar. During basic training, the political commissar's primary responsibility centered on the political education, but he also was involved with all of the

military training, just like the commander and the two deputies. The political commissar generally split duties with the company commander, and he mirrored the commander's functions during the recruiting process, traveling to the military departments in the counties, communes and villages. Since a recruiting company usually had two or more counties assigned, and a quota of approximately 120 to 150 recruits, there was plenty of work for all four members of the command element to do.

Soldiers trained day and night; political education usually occurred at night; but other training was also done at night.⁹¹ The regimen involved a minimum of eight training hours per day--but usually more than ten--six days per week for three to six months, depending on the type of unit. Specialized units conducted all of the same training as the rest of the PLA training units, but they also trained their recruits in their specialties. Essentially, all PLA ground forces' recruits were trained first as infantry soldiers, then they were taught their additional skills.⁹²

⁹¹ DIA Handbook, p.3-7, section 3-29; p.3-26, section 3-112; and p.4-3, section 4-8d. The latter states: "Virtually all movement and the majority of operations occur at night."

⁹² Godwin, p.91, alludes to this, although he says that the method for training the recruits was uncertain. This was essentially the same concept used by the U.S. Army and Marine Corps; the first eight weeks of basic training/boot camp taught recruits the rudimentary elements of soldiering, which involved the basic skills of the infantryman; then they went to various locations for their advanced individual training, as cooks, air defense artillerymen, communications specialists, etc. The Marines took this concept one step further, training all of their officers at the same basic school at Quantico, Virginia, where they spend six months learning to be Marine officers--infantry officers, as it were--then they go to their specialty schools to learn the basics of their separate branches, i.e., communications and electronics,

Therefore, basic training usually took six months for these soldiers; three months was standard for infantry units.⁹³

Three to six months greatly exceeded the standard eight weeks of basic training and eight weeks of advanced individual training usually given to U.S. soldiers. When I asked him why they spent so much time learning the same basic skills that we taught in eight weeks, my colleague said that great emphasis was placed on learning and mastering the skills taught in basic training; so he felt that new soldiers were fairly skillful when they arrived in their parent units. Upon further discussion, he agreed with me that the emphasis placed upon rote memorization in the Chinese education system probably influenced this requirement that recruits be able to master their basic skills before they arrived at their units. The American system differed significantly in this respect. Basic trainees received detailed familiarization with their basic skills; but the philosophy in the U.S. Army has been that the best training ground, and the place where soldiers learned the most about their jobs, was in the parent unit, working with senior soldiers and non-commissioned officers.

Basic training was also discipline training; it was the harshest period of one's service in the army. Drop-out and failure

taught at Quantico, or field artillery, taught at the Army's Field Artillery Center, Ft. Sill, Oklahoma. Army officers attend their basic officer schools at their separate branches' centers; for instance, infantry officers go to the Infantry School, Ft. Benning, Georgia; and armor officers attend basic armor officer training at Ft. Knox, Kentucky, the Armor School, where Marine armor officers also go after their basic schooling at Quantico.

⁹³ DIA Handbook, p.5-25, section 5-44.

rates were extremely low, however, and my colleague never encountered "short-timers' attitude" among his soldiers, such as Viktor Suvarov described as the norm in the Soviet Army.⁹⁴ The cohesion mentioned earlier was one reason; and the remarkable opportunities for social and economic advancement open to peasants through exemplary service in the PLA was another.

Basic training was conducted either at the army headquarters or the division base, depending on which level coordinated recruiting, as previously discussed. A separate basic training facility--barracks and training grounds--existed for this purpose on each division base or army headquarters' base, depending on where basic training was normally conducted in the army's command structure. In any case, recruits were trained and housed in a separate location than the regular units. (Figure 9 depicts the basic layout for a division base.)

Divisions had two bases, one for living and garrison duty and training; the second was a training base with an impact area and berms to absorb stray rounds and shrapnel from exploding ordnance. Bases were fairly small in comparison to most American bases; but

⁹⁴ Viktor Suvarov, Inside the Soviet Army, (New York: Berkeley Books, 1982), p.265. The entire chapter, "The Soldier's Lot," beginning on page 253, is a scathing accusation against the lack of proper leadership and the misery of a Soviet soldier. See the DIA Handbook, p.5-19, section 5-35, for the contrast, part of which reads: "The Chinese soldier is considered one of the most highly motivated soldiers in the world today." Also, Nelsen, "The Organization of China's Ground Forces," p.74, discussing the political commissar's role in wartime. He discusses the motivation of Chinese troops and how only the severe test of the Korean War, particularly the latter stages, was able to deteriorate morale to a high degree in the PLA. Alexander George also discusses this in great detail in The Chinese Communist Army in Action.

they were large enough to house the division on the one hand, and to allow for gunnery training on the other hand. The division set up timetables and elaborate schedules in order to expedite training usage by each subordinate unit. Units generally maneuvered off-post for long foot-marches, and during tactical training exercises, except when live ammunition was fired; they necessarily resorted to their training bases for these types of exercises. During off-post operations, soldiers were often housed in civilian homes or other buildings in villages within the maneuver areas.

As a regimental operations staff officer, one of my colleague's duties was to coordinate training areas, ranges, and housing arrangements during off-post maneuvers. My colleague's bases both were located within marching distance of each other--a few miles--and were surrounded by farmlands and small villages. He said that some units' living bases and training bases were separated by enough distance to require that they be trucked back and forth, except in extraordinary circumstances.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ In the United States, our bases generally are large enough to contain maneuver areas, ranges and impact areas as well as housing for all of the units on the base. A notable exception was my unit in Washington, D.C. We were housed in the middle of Arlington, Virginia, right next to Arlington National Cemetery, where we performed much of our mission, and conducted necessary funeral training. We had parade fields and a ceremonial hall for outdoor and indoor ceremonial training, as well as for individual basic skills training. When we needed to conduct extensive field training and gunnery training, we either bused or conducted an aerial assault via helicopters to Quantico Marine Corps Base, or Ft. A.P. Hill, Virginia, 45 and 75 miles distant, respectively. In Germany, my unit lived in *kasernes*, small housing bases large enough for one to three battalions' barracks, motor pools, and a small parade field. Each brigade, housed in a separate community, owned a local training area for maneuver; as I was leaving Germany, small, indoor firing ranges for rifles and pistols were being

3.2 Benefits and terms of service.

Soldiers did not receive wages for their conscripted time in the PLA.⁹⁶ Instead, they received "compensation"--*jintie*--a small monthly allowance, for their time away from home, where they would have been involved in the agricultural work of their families and production brigades. The Party officially supposed that soldiers owed their service to the state, and should not be compensated for fulfilling this duty. Nevertheless, their standard of living increased dramatically when they entered the army.⁹⁷ They had new clothes, three hearty meals each day, a place to sleep, opportunities for education and training, as well as the prestige connected with the PLA.

If one served well, the possibility existed to re-enlist for another period of service. Peasants desired to stay in the PLA as long as possible, perhaps becoming "voluntary soldiers," or even officers. Voluntary soldiers were those members of a unit, especially in more technically-oriented units like armored units,

constructed in several communities. For large-scale gunnery--tanks, heavy machine guns, missiles, and the like--we went to one of three major training areas in Germany. These were shared by most of the NATO forces, and were in high demand due to limited housing, ranges, and other facilities. For maneuver purposes, we either trained at these sites, or, several times per year, we conducted our maneuvers on the open German countryside. One of our major concerns during these last types of exercises was limiting maneuver damage to fields, forests, and built-up areas like villages and towns.

⁹⁶ Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, p.146; also, DIA Handbook, pp.5-26 to 5-27, sections 5-46 and 5-47.

⁹⁷ DIA Handbook, p.5-21, section 5-37, and p.5-27, section 5-48.

the air force, and so on, who had skills required by the unit, but were not qualified to become officers. These soldiers received salaries for their service, instead of *jintie*. Second and subsequent term enlistees, like voluntary soldiers, received salaries, which was a leap economically over the compensation they received as conscripted soldiers.

Salary was computed in three ways. First, it was based on pay grade and one's position. Second, seniority pay was factored in--one yuan per year of service--this was the same for officers and enlisted. Third, a type of cost-of-living allowance was added to adjust for inflation and the difference in standards of living in various places. Voluntary soldiers received the same amounts as officers for the last two types; they had their own pay grade, which was slightly lower than pay grade twenty-four assigned to officer candidates.⁹⁸ All voluntary soldiers were assigned the same pay grade; differences in their pay resulted due to the amount of time in service for each soldier. During my colleague's time in the PLA, the enlisted soldier's pay scale paid six, seven, eight, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-six, and thirty-two yuan per month for each year of service, one through eight, respectively. The significant increase in the last four years over the first four indicated the salaried pay of second-term enlistees and voluntary soldiers. Just as my colleague was leaving the PLA in the late 1970s, these amounts were increased two yuan per month, and again by the same amount in the early 1980s.

⁹⁸ DIA Handbook, p.5-32, section 5-65.

Conscripted soldiers served two years, minimum; and usually three. Harvey Nelsen noted that the minimum terms of service were

*three or four years for the army, four years for the air force, and five years for the navy, depending on the amount of specialized training received, but many of the men are allowed to reenlist.*⁹⁹

But two years served as a cut-off period for soldiers who did not meet desirable performance standards; the third or fourth year was allowed for good performance, and was considered a form of reenlistment. In rare cases, some soldiers who were particularly undesirable were discharged after only one year. The main reasons for early discharge were poor health or physical condition, and terrible performance. Early discharge was a kind of punishment. During my colleague's service time, the maximum amount of service allowed to voluntary soldiers or reenlisted soldiers was eight years.

My colleague estimated that nearly ninety percent of first-term soldiers desired to reenlist for a second term. The number allowed varied from year to year, based on the unit's projected needs, and the conditions and recruiting quota prescribed by the General Staff Department. Generally, a unit had one-third of its soldiers staying for the full three years and an additional reenlistment period of one to three years; one-third staying only for the initial enlistment period of two or three years; and one-third new soldiers. If a soldier departed the PLA, either voluntarily or due to the unit's initiative--bad conduct, personnel

⁹⁹ Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, pp.19-20.

cuts, or any other reason--he was not permitted to enter active duty in the PLA again. The best option for soldiers wishing to re-enter military service was the militia.

Senior soldiers in the unit with good records were given leadership positions, either as squad leaders, or as combat group leaders--the equivalent of fire team leaders in the U.S. Army, who held the rank of corporals or sergeants. Usually, one of the combat group leaders was also the deputy squad leader. These were the best soldiers in the unit; many were Party members--most of the squad leaders were members--and some were considered for officer training. As mentioned earlier, squads were broken into three combat groups of three men each, led by these senior soldiers. A fourth group consisting of the squad leader, the machine gunner and assistant machine gunner rounded out the squad. (This was a good tactical structure; and the squad leader's control of his most vital weapon was also an excellent decision, because he could control its placement of fire, ensuring that it was used to maximum effectiveness.)

Prior to the 1980s, the PLA offered benefits to soldiers and veterans in three main categories. First were the economic benefits derived from military service. Besides the increased standard of living for the soldier while he served on active duty, the major attraction was the prospect for a good job as a rural cadre or an urban worker after one finished his service in the

PLA.¹⁰⁰ Prior to the reforms of the 1980s, state-owned enterprises and collective enterprises were the two primary job options in urban areas.¹⁰¹ The state-owned enterprises were coveted above the other because of better pay and fringe benefits like health insurance, disability pay and retirement pensions.¹⁰² PLA veterans invariably got the state-owned enterprise jobs. These economic benefits were magnified by the fact that PLA veterans from peasant backgrounds often had their household registration status changed from agricultural householder to urban householder.¹⁰³ Becoming an urban resident was one of the greatest economic benefits that the PLA offered; then veterans were offered jobs in the state's "iron rice bowl"--economically the most secure position for any citizen of China.¹⁰⁴

The second category of benefits was political benefit. A good record of service in the PLA gave one a good start in life. If a

¹⁰⁰ Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, p.18: "Upon release, PLA veterans are usually assigned higher paying or more responsible jobs than the average citizen can obtain."

¹⁰¹ Martin King Whyte and William L. Parish, Urban Life in Contemporary China, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p.29. The authors cover this subject in much greater detail than I will here; their discussion begins on p.29 and runs to p.33.

¹⁰² Whyte and Parish, p.31

¹⁰³ Whyte and Parish, pp.17-22, discuss the household registration system and migration controls to strictly limit urban migration. On pp.53-54, they discuss the urban-rural income gap in China, which they estimate, per capita, to be three to one.

¹⁰⁴ Whyte and Parish, p.33. Some of the intangible benefits tied to this status included a much higher possibility of marriage, since the authors' studies indicated that urban women preferred mates from urban areas, with excellent employment options and fringe benefits. (pp.126-128).

soldier came from a questionable class background, an excellent service record often effectively wiped the slate clean, in effect. In my colleague's experience, this happened once or twice to officer's that he knew. Although one officer was turned down for Party membership due to his mother's family background, he was still considered for promotion, command, and educational opportunities due to his excellent performance. Once a soldier returned to civilian life, his veteran status made it easier for him to be considered for Party membership later in life. Most cadres in the countryside, he estimated, were PLA veterans; this was especially true in the case of minority nationalities.¹⁰⁵ Veterans had greater social privilege in the rural areas; in the cities, in *danwei*, he supposed that except for technically skilled personnel, most of the cadres were veterans also.¹⁰⁶

The third category of privilege afforded soldiers through the

¹⁰⁵ Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, p.19: Minority recruits frequently receive special training after enlistment, often becoming Party cadres in their home regions following demobilization and usually serving in their local areas....Minority military cadres are often assigned to militia duty, a practice which seems to serve the dual purpose of improving civil-military relations and further ensuring government political control in minority areas.

¹⁰⁶ Nelsen, pp.20-21, discusses the demobilization process and the job opportunities afforded veterans. See also, Gordon White, "The Politics of Social Stratification in a Socialist Society; the Case of China, 1959-1969," (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1974), pp.348, 369, 387; Michel Oksenberg, "Local Leaders in Rural China, 1962-65, Individual Attributes, Bureaucratic Positions and Political Recruitment," in A. Doak Barnett, editor, Chinese Communist Politics in Action, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969), p.164; and Alan P.L. Liu, Political Culture and Group Conflict in Communist China, (Santa Barbara: Clio Press, 1976), chapter 7; (from Nelsen, p.247).

PLA was the opportunity to become an officer, and thereby climb the ladder of power, rising in the social and political hierarchy of the PRC. Many of the PRC's highest ranking figures had attained their lofty heights in this fashion, including the likes of Zhu De, He Long, Peng Dehuai, and Mao Zedong.¹⁰⁷ This really was the only path to power open to peasants, even if in reality it was a long shot for those entering the PLA after 1949. This was why Chinese soldiers worked very hard, and competed with one another to attain this privilege through excellent performance and, reliable political attitudes and behavior.¹⁰⁸

My colleague said that his salary as an officer was approximately one-third higher than a civilian cadre with equivalent rank for the same amount of service time in government. As a platoon leader, he started at rank (pay grade) 23, the lowest rank for an officer, and he received a salary of 52 yuan per month.¹⁰⁹ A civilian friend of his with the same amount of

¹⁰⁷ Whitson, pp.30-34, and p.41, describes the obscure origins of these figures.

¹⁰⁸ Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, p.18: "...The PLA is one of the most attractive ladders of success in Chinese society." Also, "Understandably, there is fierce competition to enter the ranks of the PLA; the military draft has become as much an elimination as an induction process."

¹⁰⁹ DIA Handbook, p.5-32, section 5-65, provides a wage scale which identifies pay grade 23--platoon leader--as receiving 50 yuan per month, with adjustments for longevity to be included. Grades 24--officer candidates--and 21--company commander--received 45 and 75 yuan per month, respectively. Harry Harding, Organizing China, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981), p.73, discusses the introduction of a salary system for government and Party cadres in 1955. He gives the figures of 20 yuan per month for grade 30, and 30 yuan per month for grade 26. My colleague's figure of 38 yuan per month for a civilian cadre grade 25, even adjusting for pay

government service time had only attained rank 25, and only earned 38 yuan per month; a civilian cadre with rank 23 earned 49 yuan per month, and worked longer to get to that rank. When an officer retired or resigned from the military and moved into a government job, he took his military pay grade with him, although he was paid for that grade at the civilian rate. So, if my colleague had taken a government job with his platoon leader's rank 23, he would have earned 49 yuan, taking a minor cut in pay; still, he would have had a higher rank than a civilian contemporary with the same amount of government service.

The soldier's family also received benefits, mainly connected with prestige and reputation; but in China, these often transformed into economic and other advantages.¹¹⁰ The family received the title "junshu"--"military family." This afforded them a measure of respect among their fellow peasants. Economically, the family sometimes received compensation equal to the average living standard of their local area to replace the lost income which their absent child represented.¹¹¹ In essence, they received a subsidy

increases, which occurred only rarely, and were attacked in the Cultural Revolution, does seem lower, especially considering that the increase between grades 24 and 23 was only 5 yuan on the military pay scale, and 10 yuan separated grades 26 and 30 on the civilian scale. Clearly, military salaries were significantly larger than the civilian counterparts, at least in terms of where a cadre began and finished on the scale in a given period of time compared with his PLA counterpart.

¹¹⁰ Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, p.18.

¹¹¹ Nelsen, p.146: "In rare cases, a family-support allowance is given if the recruit's absence from home causes an economic hardship on the family." More than likely, such a case would induce the local cadres to eliminate the candidate from recruiting

for their absent laborer. In concrete terms, if the average living standard in a village was two hundred kilograms of grain per year for an adult, and the soldier's lost labor represented one hundred kilograms of grain per adult of income lost to the family, then the brigade or commune made up the difference, if possible. Of course, in poorer areas, the average standard of living was lower; so, the lost labor represented different absolute values according to area, while the actual value of an adult son's labor was much harder to calculate. But peasant families were often willing to take this risk and a drop in living standards with the hope that the son's military service would translate into greater opportunities later.

Company commanders generally liked soldiers from the countryside better than the ones who came from urban areas.¹¹² My colleague was no exception to this rule. He said that this was a strong tradition, and probably dated back to Zeng Guofan and his *xiangjun*--"brave battalions"--which he used so effectively against the Taiping armies during the civil war of the mid-19th century. Zeng Guofan only recruited soldiers from the mountainous areas and the countryside--*shannong*. He rejected recruits from the cities. His experience taught him that mountain and peasant folk were very sturdy, worked long and hard, and did not complain nor question

consideration; or else, PLA recruiters might disqualify him themselves for the same reasons; this topic was discussed in greater detail in "Chapter Two, Recruiting."

¹¹² In contrast, Ellis Joffe, Party and Army, pp.72-73, discussed the estrangement between officers and soldiers in the 1950s and early 1960s which so alarmed Mao and other Party leaders. "Some of the new officers come from *bourgeois* backgrounds and have tended to be contemptuous of peasant recruits." (p.73).

orders. My colleague said that the idea still held true during his service period. He said that Li Hongzhang and Yuan Shikai followed this same rule, and they were generally very successful in establishing their military power. The system broke down in the 1920s and '30s because the warlords and KMT conscripted ruthlessly, even resorting to kidnapping. But the PLA revived the tradition in the 1930s when they conducted guerilla warfare, and practiced it faithfully, and with good results, since that period.

3.3 Soldier living conditions.

The PLA assigned three standards of living for troops--first, second, or third class.¹¹³ Pilots and submarine crews enjoyed first class meals and living standards. Officers at regimental headquarters and higher levels received second class meals and living standards. The bulk of the PLA lived under the third class heading.

Living conditions depended a lot on where a unit was stationed, as well as which unit was considered. China was divided into twelve regions according to the standard of living of each region; twelve was high, one was low. Civilians had different salaries in different areas, depending on the ranking of these areas. The PLA, likewise, reflected the standard of living ranking of their host region. This affected the salaries officers received, compensation paid to soldiers, and the grain allowance allotted to units. Actually, the PLA had a number of methods by

¹¹³ DIA Handbook, p.5-27, section 5-46 and p.6-12, section 6-29, provides some support for this concept, as it mentions different pay scales for different units.

which it increased the standard of living.

Here was another point of contrast between the PLA and the U.S. military. A myth existed about the Chinese soldier in American academic and military circles: many pundits contended that he could survive on a handful of rice per day, so he could go anywhere and fight--with his rucksack on his back and his rifle and a bag of rice in his hands.¹¹⁴ My colleague said that this was essentially correct; but there were several reasons which made this possible. Although commanders wanted to give their troops the best food possible, China was still a poor, developing nation.¹¹⁵ The soldier's standard of living was the fixed amount mentioned above, based on the average standard of living for the specific period and area in which the unit existed, supplemented by what the unit provided from its own production.

In general, the PLA food supply was much better than the food supply in the surrounding area. Nevertheless, the PLA did not worry about food supplies and other logistical support the way that the U.S. military did. Because the standard of living of the average Chinese was much lower than the average American's, grain was the staple item in the Chinese diet. Moreover, many peasants ate only grain and vegetables every day, and meager amounts by American standards. Ninety percent of all recruits came from peasant families; so, they had a history of working hard and living

¹¹⁴ O'Ballance, The Red Army of China, p.212.

¹¹⁵ George, pp.66-67, discusses the political commissar's concern about food and troop morale and welfare.

on very small amounts of food. Thus, if the PLA needed to return to the days of "a handful of rice per man per day," it just stood to reason that these hardy soldiers of peasant extraction could easily revert to their old customs.¹¹⁶

In my colleague's unit in the Beijing Military Region, soldiers received forty-five jin--twenty-two and a half kilograms--of grain per month.¹¹⁷ This was the basic grain ration for soldiers and officers in a company. Officers at regimental and higher levels only received thirty-eight jin--nineteen kilograms. Of course, their other benefits made up for this shortage.¹¹⁸ The grain ration was an accounting tool used by the commissariat to calculate the amount of grain and rations money issued to the

¹¹⁶ Of course, this may be oversimplifying the situation. George, pp.69-70, demonstrated that food was a major concern of soldiers, and a major factor in morale and unit cohesion. While the Chinese soldier may be able to fare better than his American counterpart under situations of severe deprivation, it is doubtful that any soldier or army can operate effectively for prolonged periods under such circumstances. "An army travels on its stomach."

¹¹⁷ For a reference to the significance of this amount of grain per month as a suitable standard for subsistence, consider the following table, which compares the Chinese definition of subsistence with that of international relief organizations in terms of per capita distribution of unhusked grain in jin per month (Taken from Jean C. Oi, State and Peasant in Contemporary China, [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989], pp.47-48.):

	<u>Deficit</u>	<u>Self-sufficient</u>	<u>Surplus</u>
<u>International</u>	44	45-51.5	51.6
<u>Chinese</u>	26-27	27-29	30-35

¹¹⁸ Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, p.146. Also, compare the pay scales for soldiers and officers in DIA Handbook, p.5-27, section 5-47, and p.5-32, section 5-65, respectively.

companies for the purpose of buying other foodstuffs. The regimental *houqinbu* issued the appropriate grain certificates according to personnel figures reported by the company. The company's logistics officer and cooking squad used the money and grain certificates to purchase grain, meat, vegetables and other items. Officers paid the same amount of compensation for the grain to the logistics officer which was "paid" as compensation to the soldiers in order to pay for their share of the grain rations--approximately twelve to fifteen yuan per month. Officers paid cash since they were salaried personnel.¹¹⁹ Because military service was mandatory, soldiers did not receive wages; part of the compensation--*jintie*--paid to them, in addition to the allowance already mentioned, was this basic grain and rations allotment, which was credited to the company's rations account. (It is the use of this rations account which occupied the company Soldiers' Committee, as the next chapter discusses.)

Each company had its own cooking squad, which worked for the logistics officer. Each cooking squad had its own section of the battalion mess hall in which to do the cooking. Cooking squads usually only cooked for their own companies. This provided an opportunity for some friendly competition and bragging rights. My colleague recalled a time when he was a regimental inspecting

¹¹⁹ In the U.S. Army, officers pay a surcharge for meals in addition to the price paid by married soldiers and non-commissioned officers; both of these groups receive a basic subsistence allowance, non-taxable, as part of their pay and benefits. Single soldiers and non-commissioned officers receive their meals free as part of their basic service contracts. In the field, the officers' surcharges are usually waived.

officer, and all of the company commanders in his old battalion urged him to inspect their mess operations and pronounce a winner in a cooking contest. Inspecting officers could eat anywhere they chose; so he enjoyed taking part in the contest, as well as getting a good meal in the bargain.

Like the U.S. Army, the PLA placed the dining facility under more scrutiny than almost any other aspect of their daily operation. Most of the complaints that he heard concerned meals. He never saw a case, but he heard about several cases of food poisoning. He saw one case of uncleared food--which could be quite alarming in China since "nightsoil" played such an important role in the fertilizing process! Like us, the PLA leaders believed that the mess hall could make or break morale in a unit, as well as ruin a unit if improper sanitation practices abounded.

At mealtimes, the whole company usually ate together in its own section of the mess hall. Generally, a whole squad sat down together at a large table. Then, one soldier per squad went to the kitchen to pick up his squad's meal. Grain and vegetables were plentiful--soldiers usually could eat as much as they wished. Unit farm production generally made up for the spare official grain rations allotted according to the average standard of living in the unit's host community. Other dishes, such as ones containing meat and fish, were limited in the serving sizes per man.

Variety in the diet depended mainly on the commander, the logistics officer, and the skills of the cooking squad. Of course, soldiers preferred dishes from their native provinces; Southerners

liked rice, and Northerners liked wheat. But in the PLA, everyone got the same standard supply and the same basic quality of foodstuffs. Soldiers also could request certain foods through their chain-of-command; or they could buy something that they really craved. The basic blend of grains was twenty percent rice, forty percent wheat, and forty percent corn and other grains, like millet or sorghum. As noted in more detail in chapter four, the PLA supplemented their allotted food rations with side production from their own farms.¹²⁰

Soldiers lived in platoon or squad bays, large rooms in which the whole unit--either thirty or ten men respectively--lived and slept. A company usually had four bays in a long, ranch-style building, similar to the quonset huts formerly used by the U.S. military for the same purposes. Two types of sleeping arrangements were used: either bunk beds, two high, or else long communal beds called *chang kang*--"long bed"--or *tong pu*--"common bed." (See Figure 6). The latter arrangement amounted to nothing more than a long board attached to the wall, and supported underneath by short boards for legs, on which ten to twenty soldiers laid their thin cotton mattresses and blankets side by side.

My colleague commanded a separate company, which was not housed near other units. His building contained squad bays. He said that he never heard of units with only two or three soldiers

¹²⁰ Gittings, p.196: "In one division visited by Edgar Snow in 1960, 1,700 acres of land were cultivated, enabling the guaranteed ration to be fixed at one-third more than the civilian ration."

per room. He was surprised to hear that most American units housed their troops in this method. He felt that such an arrangement would have caused problems of discipline, administration, and supervision. He also felt that the communal bay increased unit cohesion, whereas it was diminished in such an isolating environment. He felt that group living was much better for teaching group cooperation and teamwork. PLA leaders believed that spartan living conditions produced the best soldiers. Conversely, too much comfort corrupted a soldier and made it tougher for soldiers to fight under adverse conditions.¹²¹

At West Point, the cadets arranged their rooms in accordance with a regulation called the Barracks Arrangement Guide, which specifically detailed the exact order and placement of every item in the cadet rooms. So, too, did the PLA utilize a guide for the arrangement of their barracks, called *neiwu weisheng*. This regulation stipulated strict uniformity and order throughout the barracks. These regulations were thoroughly enforced; one could have walked into any barracks throughout a division and found the rooms all arranged in the same way.¹²²

Companies usually had showers in their barracks; otherwise, they used their washrooms to clean up. There was a large bathing

¹²¹ DIA Handbook, p.5-19, section 5-35: "While he may fall below Western standards in literacy and technical proficiency, he surpasses the average Western soldier in his ability to bear extraordinary hardships."

¹²² Young, The Dragon's Teeth, pp.130-131, has some excellent photographs of a platoon bay, showing the spartan accommodations and strictly regimented details described here.

facility at either the battalion or regimental headquarters which could accommodate about one company at a time--approximately one hundred fifty men. These were heated pools, and considered one of the few luxuries of army life. The battalion or regimental headquarters rotated a schedule for this facility; on average, a soldier bathed about once a week in these pools. They showered or washed in the washroom once a day. Latrines usually were located in the barracks building also.

Every soldier was issued a thin cotton mattress and a cotton comforter, called a *beizi*, thick enough for warmth, yet thin enough to easily roll up and put away each morning in a flash; they were all the same size. They also received a white, cotton bedsheet, a cotton blanket, a raincoat, overcoat, heavy cotton winter underclothing, a winter cap, two sets of winter uniforms, two or three sets of summer uniforms, two summer shirts, two summer caps, four sets of rubber, winter and cotton shoes, gloves, socks and underwear, and other items suitable for the locations and missions of the units. Twice a year, in the Spring and Fall, soldiers were issued uniforms and equipment to replace or supplement these items.

In the 1950s and '60s, soldiers had free mail privileges, similar to the system recently used by U.S. troops in the Persian Gulf, who simply wrote "free mail" and signed their names in the upper right hand corner of the envelope. In the 1970s, this practice was discontinued because the central government felt that living standards had risen enough to reduce the burden on soldiers and their families that such added expenses represented in the

earlier decades. My colleague believed that mail to and from troops comprised regular mail, and was not censored. Nevertheless, regulations existed which prohibited soldiers and officers from discussing training, living conditions, hardships and other details of soldierly living in one's private letters. Soldiers received political education and training in basic training and in their regular units regarding confidential matters. Thus, one must conclude that the possibility did exist; my colleague allowed that some soldiers in special units, like the Second Artillery Corps (nuclear missile forces), might have had their mail censored; also, mail might have been censored during irregular periods of the PRC's history. Soldiers and their families normally used the civilian postal service, so censorship would have been extremely difficult to perform, simply due to the vast amounts of mail.

A typical day began with wake-up at 6:00 a.m., or 6:30 during the winter when there is less daylight.¹²³ Soldiers had fifteen minutes to wash themselves and roll up their beds and clean up their living areas. Then they spent forty-five minutes to an hour doing physical training. Physical training usually involved running two to three miles, marching or some other sort of basic skills training, and calisthenics. The commander made up the training schedule and determined what activities were done.

After physical training, the unit took half an hour for

¹²³ DIA Handbook, p.5-25, section 5-45, produces a training schedule almost exactly the same as the one depicted here; the main difference being that lights out in that schedule was half an hour earlier than the time given here--9.00 p.m.

breakfast. After breakfast, the company conducted its first four-hour training period. This consisted of four or five forty to fifty-minute classes, with a ten-minute break every hour. These classes varied from bayonet training to drill and ceremony to maintenance of uniforms and equipment. Next came lunch--another thirty minutes. After lunch came an activity which was unthinkable for Americans, yet would probably be greeted with genuine pleasure by many soldiers and officers: an hour to hour-and-a-half devoted to rest. Every soldier was required to lie down on his bunk and remain there for the entire period; obviously, the preferred enterprise was napping. (The period was shorter in winter, again due to the shorter daylight hours.)¹²⁴

After the nap came another four-hour training period, either military or political in nature. Dinner came at 6:00 or 6:30 p.m.; then soldiers had an hour of free time. From 7:30 to 8:30, soldiers participated in political study or education. Most evenings, this training involved squads reading and discussing the single newspaper that the squad received every day; otherwise, they listened to the radio, and discussed the items that they heard. The soldiers had the next thirty minutes to clean up and prepare for the next day. Taps and lights out occurred at approximately 9:30. This was the typical schedule, Monday through Saturday; my colleague said that it was very intense, and soldiers were very fatigued at the end of the day.

Sundays and holidays were usually free; but soldiers could not

¹²⁴ DIA Handbook, p.5-25, section 5-45.

leave the garrison without a pass.¹²⁵ Only one-third of soldiers received passes for any given day. The platoon leaders were the authorizing agent for this privilege. This free time on Sunday usually ran from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The unit always conducted a routine inspection on Sunday just before 9:00, with the commander walking through the unit formation, accompanied by platoon leaders and squad leaders. The inspection was followed by the company's breakfast. Units only had two meals on Sundays, first at 9:00, and again at 4:00.

After the morning meal, soldiers left on pass or used their free time to perform personal errands, such as washing clothes and writing letters, which they had no time for during the week. If a visitor entered the barracks on Sunday, he would find laundry hung up everywhere to dry, and the soldiers sitting around writing letters, or busy cleaning their uniforms and equipment. My colleague's barracks contained washrooms with long rows of large, deep sinks specifically suited for washing laundry; soldiers usually washed their own clothes by hand. One of the multitudinous "Lei Feng" stories--propaganda stories of a young model soldier who purportedly gave his life for the cause of the communist revolution and used by the Party to stress the virtues of the socialist construction--described this hero's selfless attitude as he washed his squad's laundry so that his comrades might enjoy their free

¹²⁵ DIA Handbook, p.5-27, sections 5-49 and 5-50; they only talk about the strict leave policy of the PLA. George, pp.71-73, discloses that the PLA was very severe with leaves and passes due to fears of desertion, low morale, and poor efficiency.

time engaged in some other form of Party activity.¹²⁶

Soldiers sometimes participated in some type of recreation event; and televisions and radios tuned in to the world beyond their company, to which they paid little attention during the week, except during political education training. Some of the events popular among Chinese soldiers were ping pong, basketball, chess, cards, mahjongg, volleyball, soccer, and swimming. At 4:00 p.m., the unit conducted an assembly formation, and roll was called. All soldiers were required to be present; following that, the unit took its Sunday evening meal together. Afterwards, squads conducted meetings and evaluated the past week's performance, discussed squad and unit affairs, and prepared for the week ahead.

I asked my colleague to explain how soldiers avoided boredom in this very spartan existence. He scorned the question as typically American, and essentially meaningless to a Chinese commander. Soldiers were kept too busy to become bored; their opportunities to rest and relax were few, and far between. Typical problems in training and unit life usually came when something fouled the training schedule. Bad weather, while usually not enough to de-rail a training activity, certainly created conditions when minimal results were achieved. He remembered a training inspection of his company while they fired at the rifle range in a driving rainstorm. His soldiers fired fairly well under the conditions, and surprised the inspectors, as well as himself and his subordinate leaders.

¹²⁶ Related to me by Professor Don Munro.

3.4 Relationships between soldiers.

I asked my colleague about ethnic problems between soldiers, and whether regionalism was a problem affecting discipline in the unit. He said that, basically, problems like that did not occur in the units he served. Soldiers from various regions melded together fairly well because of the common national language, and common national culture. Units recruited from different provinces and prefectures every year, depending on the assignments handed down from the General Staff Department to their army commands. Soldiers and officers got used to people from other regions, and developed ties to the unit which overcame potential regional problems.

If soldiers came from the same county, commune, or village, then they usually developed closer ties; in the U.S. Army, the phrase commonly used for this kind of tie is "home-boy" or "homey." Often, because many soldiers came into a unit from the same county at the same time, they might tend to stick a little closer together than they would with strangers from different prefectures and provinces; but this tendency was broken up by the small group practices used in the squads when soldiers reached their parent companies.¹²⁷ Otherwise, he said that regionalism was not an issue. The intense training, political education, unit pride developed from basic training, and the spartan conditions in the barracks converged to bind soldiers together with strong ties to their company. Incentives tied to good performance and

¹²⁷ George, pp.50-55; he discusses the small group system in the PLA which has been prevalent since the revolutionary days in Yenan.

opportunities for advancement also served to curb any tendencies for improper behavior along ethnic or regional lines. Differing dialects did not pose a problem, either, as they did in the Soviet Army. Basically, soldiers--the vast bulk of which were peasants--appreciated being in the army because of the benefits already explained above. They did not want to mess up their golden opportunity.

When soldiers had disputes, they were generally settled within the squad or small group setting. If this level could not settle a matter, then it was referred to the Youth League, or even to the Party, before it went up higher in the chain-of-command. Of course, the chain-of-command could settle a matter, but soldiers preferred to solve it at the lowest level possible. Senior soldiers took good care of newer men; there was not any of the quasi-official hazing and harassment which was found in the Soviet Army.

When a soldier committed a more serious offense, such as going AWOL (Absent Without Leave), then it was handled by the commander according to the regulations regarding that offense. Sometimes a squad, or small group, was held accountable for the infraction of one of its members. More likely, however, to receive blame and some form of reprimand for a soldier's error was the man's squad leader. The feeling was that the squad leader was responsible for his men and should know when they were having problems.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ George, pp.190-196. Also p.93 had this quote from a captured political officer:

The one situation in which my colleague thought that he would have problems such as these was when he recruited and commanded *Huimin*--ethnic Moslems. His major concern, however, was ensuring that he provided them with a special diet which excluded pork and other foods which might be an affront to their culture and religion. Regulations stipulated that *Huimin* soldiers were to receive lamb or beef in place of pork in their diet. When these were not available, they either ate solely grain and vegetables, or they ate the pork. He said that many *Huimin* soldiers actually liked to eat pork.

Regulations (and Communist Party doctrine) prohibited religious practices, however. The *Huimin* were an official minority, and the official governmental practice in China was to respect minority customs and culture.¹²⁹ He did not remember any other types of problems with other minorities. He never heard of anyone in the PLA violating the prohibition on religion; and it never became an item of attention or concern during recruiting or in his unit.

The company was the unit where the Chinese soldier lived and

If there happened to be any deserter in the squad, the Party men, the Youth League members in the squad and the squad leader were responsible for it, so that they were to be criticized for not having observed closely and educated him thoroughly.

¹²⁹ Michael L. Waddle, "Chapter Two: Physical Environment and People," in China Handbook, pp.87-88. This passage indicates that policy during the Cultural Revolution was very hostile to minorities. Not until after the fall of the "Gang of Four" did policies attempt to ameliorate the situations caused by the radicals' assimilation policy.

worked. We have already seen facets of that environment obliquely, as we examined the entrance of enlisted soldiers into the PLA, and the activities and qualities which made up their lives in the PLA. In the next chapter, we will explore in more detail what the company environment looked and felt like, beginning with the commander-political commissar relationship.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Company as a Microcosm of the PLA

4.1 The Company Commander-Political Commissar relationship.

A typical light infantry company in the PLA consisted of the following elements:

- a command element;
- three infantry platoons;
- one firepower, or heavy weapons, squad--huoliban
- one logistics squad--tuishiban--the cooking squad.

The authorized strength for an infantry company was eight officers and one hundred thirty-two soldiers. Platoons had thirty-seven men, divided into three squads of twelve men each. Each platoon was commanded by an officer platoon leader; some units had assistant platoon leaders, but my colleague's unit did not. The logistics squad, twelve men, was controlled by the logistics officer. He also supervised the company medic, who was a member of the logistics squad. The company command element consisted of the commander and the political commissar; and each of these had a deputy. The deputy commander monitored the mortar squad (again, twelve men), and coordinated their actions in the field. Thus, each company had eight officers, which was significantly larger than the five found in the typical American infantry company.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ These figures do not match with those given by Nelsen and Harlan Jencks in The Chinese Military System, p.244; nor in the DIA Handbook, p.A-6. Nevertheless, I feel that the figures presented in this paper are more accurate. The authors mentioned above cite the company strength as 9 officers and 143 soldiers, organized in three infantry rifle platoons of 38 men and a fourth machine gun platoon, plus the logistics/cooking squad and a mortar squad. The figure of 38 personnel in a platoon also assumed the existence of an assistant platoon leader, which was not always the case in the PLA. Simple arithmetic using their figures will show that the

One major difference between American units and the PLA: the PLA did not have a non-commissioned officer corps. Squad leaders were senior soldiers with excellent records, often on the track to selection as officers. The platoon leader was solely responsible for the duties shared in the American army by the platoon sergeant and platoon leader. With his company commander, he planned, executed, and supervised training and all other activities of his unit--functions traditionally associated with an officer platoon leader in the American army. He also served as the primary expert, along with the squad leaders, on basic skills, marksmanship, wear of the uniforms, as well as getting his soldiers out of bed in the morning, and ensuring that they were in bed at night; additionally, platoon leaders lived with their troops

organization of these elements does not match the manpower figures given:

3 x 37 (infantry rifle platoons)	= 111	(3 officers)
1 x 12 (logistics squad)	= 12	(1 logistics officer)
1 x 12 (mortar squad)	= 12	
command element		(4 officers)
	<hr/>	
	= 135	8 officers

This only leaves 9 soldiers for the machine gun platoon--less than a squad, and certainly not commanded by the ninth officer listed in these sources. Officers do not command squads and smaller elements; the logistics officer does not command the logistics/cooking squad, instead, their activities fall under his purview as the company logistics expert. If a company needed more firepower for a given mission, then the battalion staff attached a machine gun team, squad or platoon as needed. It did not make any sense to organize a machine gun platoon within a company when each squad in the company had a machine gun, totalling nine machine guns in the company. In my light infantry company, we had two machine guns per platoon, totalling six for the entire company. As a mechanized rifle platoon leader in Germany, I had nine machine guns--five medium M-60 machine guns, and four heavy .50 caliber machine guns mounted on my four armored personnel carriers.

in the barracks--something which usually happened in the U.S. Army only in the field. The latter list of duties fell into the category of what we in the U. S. Army called "sergeants' business."

The PLA platoon leader performed all of these, aided only by his squad leaders, who mainly took care of their own squads.¹³¹

¹³¹ Sergeant Major Dan Cragg, U.S. Army (Retired), The NCO Guide, (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 1986), pp.20 and 28-30:

The Officer/Non-commissioned Officer Relationship: (p.20)

1. The officer commands, establishes policy, plans and programs the work of the army. The NCO conducts the daily business of the army within established orders, directives, and policies.
2. The officer concentrates on collective training which will enable the unit to accomplish the mission. The NCO concentrates on individual training which develops the capability to accomplish the mission.
3. The officer is primarily involved with unit operations, training, and related activities. The NCO is primarily involved with training individual soldiers and teams.
4. The officer concentrates on unit effectiveness and unit readiness. The NCO concentrates on each subordinate NCO and soldier and on the small teams of the unit--to insure that each is well trained, highly motivated, ready, and functioning.
5. The officer pays particular attention to the standards of performance, training, and professional development of officers as well as NCOs. The NCO concentrates on standards of performance, training, and professional development of NCOs and enlisted personnel.
6. The officer creates conditions--makes the time and resources available--so the NCO can do the job. The NCO gets the job done.

NCO Responsibilities: (pp.28-30)

While officer and NCO responsibilities may be shared, the tasks necessary to accomplish them should not be. NCO responsibilities are divided into twelve broad categories. They are the "Bible" of the NCO Corps. (I will only list the headings, not the discussions of each).

1. Individual training of soldiers in Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) and in basic soldiering skills.
2. Personal and professional development of soldiers.
3. Accountability for the squad, section, or team.
4. Military appearance, physical conditioning, and training of soldiers.

This differentiation deserved a fuller comparison, since it marked one of the two greatest differences between the PLA and the U.S. Army. One clear example of the difference in function between American platoon leaders and platoon sergeants on a given mission came from the Ranger Handbook, discussing the division of labor

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5. Physical and mental well-being of the soldier and his or her family.
 6. Supervision, control, motivation, and discipline of subordinates.
 7. Communication between the individual soldier and the organization.
 8. Plan and conduct day-to-day unit operations within prescribed policies.
 9. Maintain established standards of performance for soldiers and NCOs.
 10. Maintenance, serviceability, accountability, and readiness of arms, clothing, vehicles, and equipment.
 11. Appearance and condition of unit billets, facilities, and work areas.
 - 12 Advise on, support, and implement policy established by the chain-of-command.

For officers, these responsibilities also applied; however, the difference in focus, even at the platoon level, made it impossible for an officer to perform these duties without significant, competent help. Only at the platoon and company levels do officers have close, day-to-day contact with soldiers in the performance of duties and accomplishment of missions. Platoon leaders, still novices to their profession, already are responsible for twenty to forty soldiers. Company commanders, though more experienced, are responsible for one hundred to two hundred soldiers (I was the executive officer--second-in-command--of a four hundred man company in a mechanized infantry battalion). NCOs focus on the soldiers who actually perform the tasks which make up the mission to be accomplished; officers must focus on the unit's performance, and they depend on good communications with the leaders of the subordinate units under their command. Some officers, through force of will and unreasonably long hours, are able to successfully micro-manage their units at the platoon and company levels; but these officers seldom make good commanders at higher levels because they have not developed the leadership, communications and motivational skills necessary for success at these more complex levels. They may be able to cow young squad leaders and lieutenants; but they cannot handle the pressures of leading bevvies of more experienced and hardened captains, majors, and senior NCOs.

involved in a combat patrol:¹³²

Patrol/platoon leader planning guide.

1. TROOP LEADING PROCEDURE.

a. Receive mission/begin planning.

- (1) Estimate the situation/analyze the mission.
- (2) Plan the use of available time.
- (3) Formulate a tentative plan.
- (4) Organize men, weapons, and equipment.

b. Issue a warning order.

c. Continue estimate of the situation.

- (1) analyze terrain map, sketch, or aerial photograph

for:

- observation and fields of fire;
- cover and concealment;
- obstacles;
- key terrain;
- avenues of approach.

- (2) make a preliminary plan.

d. Conduct coordination.

e. Make reconnaissance (complete analysis of enemy and terrain).

f. Complete plan.

g. Issue order.

h. Inspect/rehearse/supervise.

i. Execute the mission.

2. DECISION MAKING PROCESS.

PHASES

Prepare

Decide

Act

3. METT.

STEPS

- identify problem; gather information.
- develop and list courses of action;
- analyze courses; select the best course.
- implement and reevaluate the solution.

When analyzing possible courses of action, consider: Mission; Enemy situation; Terrain and weather; Troops and time available.

Assistant patrol leader/platoon sergeant checklist.

1. ACTIONS DURING MOVEMENTS AND AT HALTS.

- a. Take action necessary to facilitate movement.
- b. Supervise rear security during movement.
- c. Supervise the establishment and maintenance of security during halts.

d. Perform additional tasks as required by the PL and assist the PL in every way possible.

e. Make map checks.

2. ACTIONS IN THE OBJECTIVE AREA.

- a. Assist in the occupation of the objective rallying point (ORP).

¹³² Ranger Handbook, ST 21-75-2 (Ft. Benning, Georgia: Ranger Department, United States Army Infantry School, October, 1980), pp.1.1-1.3.

b. Supervise the establishment and maintenance of an alert system in the ORP.

c. Supervise the final preparation of weapons and equipment in the ORP per guidance from PL.

d. Assist the PL in control.

e. Supervise the reorganization and redistribution of ammo and equipment and insure accountability and status of personnel, to include WIA's and KIA's, is maintained.

f. Perform additional tasks assigned by the PL.

3. ACTIONS IN A PATROL BASE.

a. Assist in the occupation of the patrol base.

b. Assist in supervising the establishment and adjustment of the perimeter.

c. Maintain security in the patrol base.

(1) Keep movement and noise to a minimum.

(2) Supervise camouflage and perimeter preparation.

(3) Periodically inspect perimeter and insure that sectors of fire are assigned.

(4) Insure that designated personnel remain alert, and that equipment is maintained in a state of readiness.

d. Requisition supplies, water, ammo, and supervise their redistribution.

e. Supervise the priority of work and insure its accomplishment.

(1) Maintenance plan.

(2) Hygiene plan.

(3) Messing plan.

(4) Water plan.

(5) Rest plan.

f. Perform additional tasks assigned by the PL and assist him in every way possible.

Unmistakably, the platoon leader and platoon sergeant had different objectives, even as they both concentrated on the same goal: accomplishing the mission. The platoon leader attended to planning, leading, and executing the patrol mission. The platoon sergeant attended to the various parts of the unit and mission, ensuring that the platoon operated like a well-oiled machine, smoothly performing each task involved in the successful accomplishment of the mission. In the PLA, the platoon leaders necessarily performed both sets of tasks.

One reason for this deletion of the non-commissioned officer

(NCO) ranks stemmed from the political nature of the PLA, and the odious stigma attached to such a division of labor by radical Maoists steeped in the rhetoric of class struggle.¹³³ An officer corps which could not get its hands dirty working alongside its soldiers ran the risk of being labeled "*bourgeois*," or even "*aristocratic*." So the undesirable division of labor was eliminated by abolishing this layer between officers and their soldiers--most of whom were peasants with limited educational and social opportunities, while officers often were more educated and might have come from urban backgrounds. Since many of the highest-ranking officers in the PLA began as peasant guerrillas, and distinguished themselves through many years of civil war and combat--not by fancy educational backgrounds--this prejudice was easy to understand.¹³⁴

Another reason for the lack of sergeants stemmed from the method used by the PLA to select their officers. Officers came from the ranks; platoon leaders and company commanders scrutinized

¹³³ Joffe, Party and Army, pp.72-80.

¹³⁴ For two outstanding, and slightly contrasting, analyses of this political-professional conflict in the PRC and PLA, see William Whitson's The Chinese High Command, and Franz Schurmann's Ideology and Organization in Communist China, specifically the chapter on Villages--"The Emergence of the Communes," and "The Militarization of the Peasantry," pp.474-482--and in the Supplement, on the Army, pp.557-574. Whitson posits the "red vs. expert" conflict as one between politicizing Maoists and professionalizing military officers. Schurmann says that the distinction is more complicated, involving the role of the Soviet Union, and three parties--the Maoists; the politically-oriented officers like Peng Dehuai, who wished to lean more on the Soviets for military support; and more politically-neutral professional officers, such as Ye Jianying, who were more interested in pure military development and professionalization.

their troops carefully, looking for signs of excellent leadership potential. This system was similar to the Israeli Army's selection system; both armies believed that the best officers first were good soldiers, and both had historically commissioned only from the ranks; nevertheless, the Israelis still had an NCO corps.¹³⁵ (During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the PLA began commissioning officers from military school directly, thus circumventing enlisted service). Therefore, platoon leaders were excellent soldiers, deputy squad leaders, and squad leaders before they ever took on the mantle of officership. They completely qualified as models for their soldiers, having stood among their ranks for several years prior to their selection as officers. This "model from the ranks" concept was exactly the justification used by the U.S. Army and most other armies, including the Soviet Army, for establishing non-commissioned officer corps.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ From discussions that I had with an Israeli officer attending the Infantry Officers Advanced Course with me in 1985.

¹³⁶ This is best illustrated by using a story from the NCO Guide, p.20:

An old major, a veteran of long service and some hard campaigns, was giving some officer candidates a practical exercise in how to lead troops. The problem involved putting up a flagpole. To do it, he had provided a sergeant and a detail of three privates with tools. But it was up to the officers candidates to figure out the best way to do the job.

They pondered the situation carefully. Several false starts were made; solutions were advanced and tried but failed because nobody seemed to be in charge; each candidate thought only he knew the right way and competed loudly with the others to be heard.

Finally the old major stepped in and with a gesture silenced the babble. "Gentlemen," said he, "allow me to demonstrate how a good officer would do this job." He turned to the sergeant and said, "Sergeant, please have the men put up the flagpole." Nothing more was said and in a few minutes the flagpole was up.

The preceding discussion of officers and non-commissioned officers related to the commander-political commissar relationship because the former was the best method I could conceive to explain the latter. Commanders and political commissars divided their duties in the same fashion that company commanders and first sergeants divided theirs in American units.¹³⁷ The American system contained two chains: one a chain-of-command and the other a chain-of-support.¹³⁸ These chains, from the battalion level downward, looked like this:

Officer chain-of-command: battalion commander---company commander---platoon leader---squad leader (the only sergeant in the chain); Non-Commissioned Officer chain-of-support: battalion sergeant major---company first sergeant---platoon sergeant---squad leader (obviously, the squad leader was the main face-to-face link of both chains to the soldier.)

The functions in the PLA relationship were not similar to the American example, but the concept of command and political chains was similar, with one significant exception. Both the commander and the political commissar were charged with the same responsibility to supervise the unit, train it, maintain its welfare and morale--their responsibility and rank were equal, and

The good officer knows that the good NCO gets the job done. The good NCO knows that the good officer will let him do it.

¹³⁷ Nelsen, "Organization of China's Ground Forces," pp.71 and 74.

¹³⁸ Cragg, pp.13-16.

their chains were comparable. However, political commissars had veto power over commanders, and commanders had to account for their unilateral actions to the company Party committee.¹³⁹ This was not so for the American analogy: officers commanded, and sergeants followed their commanders' orders.

The PLA division of labor was fairly simple: the commander took charge of military training; the commissar took charge of political education and Party activity in the unit. Likewise, their deputies divided their labors: the deputy commander oversaw logistics and routine administration; the deputy commissar headed up the Youth League, discussed later. Because both the commander and the commissar were charged with the same responsibilities, the division of labor was not always so clear cut, so leaders had to cooperate closely. Essentially, the commander could not exercise his command prerogatives unilaterally, because both parties had stakes in the performance of the unit. Cooperation did not break down very often; when it did, platoon leaders had to work out problems on their own, and the unit suffered until the company Party committee settled matters. If the Party committee was unable to resolve a conflict, then it was referred to the battalion commander and political commissar, or the battalion Party committee.¹⁴⁰

My colleague described one officer who took command of his company when he was twenty-two years old; his political commissar

¹³⁹ Nelsen, "Organization," pp.71-74.

¹⁴⁰ Nelsen, "Organization," p.72.

was thirty-seven, and had served as the political commissar in the unit for ten years already. Such an arrangement was not very common; usually the four key leaders in the command element were close to the same age, with approximately the same experience. Many people thought that they could not possibly get along; but they performed well together, because they learned to cooperate, and put the unit's interests above their own. Because this officer also was not a Party member, he necessarily relied on excellent performance in order to receive consideration for promotion, schooling, and other benefits. So, he cooperated closely with his political commissar, and listened to his seasoned advice. Political commissars also came up through the ranks, and had been excellent soldiers and platoon leaders like their command counterparts. At the company level, there was little difference in tactical military expertise and training between commanders and political commissars.

Soldiers viewed the commander and political commissar as generally the same types of figures, because they had the same authority and rank. Soldiers seldom tried to drive a wedge between the two, because the political education system, Youth League and Party activities, and squad evaluation meetings all stressed conformity with command directives and dedication to the Party; non-conformity had exceedingly uncomfortable results, which were avoided at all costs.¹⁴¹ If soldiers encountered unfair or harsh treatment, they approached their leaders about the problem. If the

¹⁴¹ George, p.101.

focus of the problem was one of the company leaders, soldiers had the right to approach that leader's superior or counterpart about the problem.

Consequently, the officer structure could be used to balance one side with the other; but troops did not try to "play one side against the other," as often happened in American units with the commander and the first sergeant or platoon leader and platoon sergeant, because the risks involved were too costly. In addition, the four-man command element served to reduce any type of manipulation by the enlisted soldiers; and the Party committee in the company was officer-heavy, with eight of the nine members being the company's officers. Because the Party influenced promotions and personnel records significantly, and one of the factors considered in promotion was whether an officer had good relationships with his peers and other officers, officers in the company guarded against such manipulation by soldiers; and the Party committee and structure of the command element reduced the inclination of soldiers to manipulate the system to their own advantage.

Junior officers (platoon leaders, and deputy commanders and commissars) received joint evaluations from the commander and political commissar; the battalion commander and battalion political commissar reviewed the reports, and added information as they saw fit. The final report was sent to the regimental headquarters' political department for final evaluation and filing. Officers never saw their evaluations, nor their personnel dossiers.

The evaluation procedure was the same for company commanders and political commissars; the only difference was that the battalion commander and commissar did the evaluations. The procedure was repeated all the way up the chain-of-command, with each political commissar and commander jointly evaluating their subordinate officers.¹⁴²

4.2 The Chinese Communist Party.

Party life in the unit was very important. The Party made all of the important decisions regarding personnel, promotions, education, and company activities.¹⁴³ Here, the political

¹⁴² In the American Army, the rated officer was required to meet with his rater within 90 days of beginning a new job, or working under a new rater. The two officers discussed goals and objectives of the job; they worked out a mutually acceptable understanding of these and the rater's expectations. Prior to the evaluation, the rated officer provided the rater and senior rater (the rater's rating officer) with a written review of his accomplishments and performance. This was used by the rater and senior rater in their evaluation. During the rating period, quarterly counseling sessions were the minimum requirement, providing the rated officer with feedback on his performance to date. After the evaluation was initially written, the rated officer reviewed it with his rater and senior rater; at this point, the rated officer was encouraged to discuss any aspect of the report, wording, etc. The officer had to sign the final copy, indicating that he had seen, even if he did not agree with it--his signature only indicated that he had indeed seen the final report. A copy was provided to the officer for his personal files, and he could request a microfiche copy of his official performance file any time he chose; and his official personnel file was also available to him at any time. This was essentially the same process for NCOs and enlisted personnel. In practice, many of these steps were neglected or overlooked; but the system did try to ensure openness, communication, and stressed performance over personal idiosyncracies.

¹⁴³ Nelsen, "Organization," pp.71-74. This really contrasted with my experience. As a commander, I could summarily and quite arbitrarily deny promotions, educational opportunities, and many other benefits to junior NCOs (E-5/sergeants) and enlisted men. I also had the only authority in my company to punish soldiers for

commissar clearly dominated. Not all officers were CCP members, although this was usually one of the major criteria considered when units selected soldiers for officer training. Most combat arms officers were CCP members. If a commander was not a member, his position could become very weak in the unit; this was one reason my colleague said that these officers generally worked harder than their peers on the overall performance of their units, so that they would not be undercut by this political disadvantage.¹⁴⁴

In the company, the Party committee was actually called a Party "branch"--*dangzhibu*. The political commissar was the Party secretary; the commander performed as the deputy Party secretary. The other six officers in the unit were also on the committee, along with one senior soldier-Party member, whose role was to provide the committee with soldiers' perspectives.¹⁴⁵ If a commander was not a Party member, he did not serve on the

offenses in violation of the Uniform Code of Military Justice; when my powers were limited due to the senior rank of one of my NCOs or officers, I could refer the charges against them to the battalion commander. Usually, as was my practice, commanders reviewed the recommendations made by the first sergeants. The first sergeants had already met with the platoon sergeants about promotions and schools, and negotiated with them (always holding the upper hand), for personnel to fill the limited slots each month. Then my top sergeant and I reviewed the list together, and I asked him questions whenever I was skeptical about an individual's merit, or was desirous to see another individual considered for some opportunity. I held the veto power, and was the final approving authority; but I rarely second-guessed my top sergeant, and we nearly always agreed on the finalized list as the best set of troopers for the opportunities afforded us in any given month.

¹⁴⁴ Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, p.52: "Virtually all officers above the company level are Party members."

¹⁴⁵ Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, p.51.

committee; his deputy then took his place as the deputy Party secretary. One-quarter to one-third of the soldiers in a unit were Party members--approximately thirty-five to forty-five soldiers.¹⁴⁶ The minimum age for Party members was eighteen. Those members not on the Party committee were assigned to Party groups of eight to ten members. Theoretically, all of the members of the Party voted to select the soldier who represented them on the Party committee. In actual practice, the officers chose this member of the committee.

In the Party, all members were theoretically equal; therefore, enlisted members could criticize officers about Party-related matters, such as one's dedication to the Party, obedience to Party directives, and performance of duties--which reflected one's commitment to the Party and the unit. In the PLA, soldiers participated in discussions about operations and tactics, so that the whole unit was involved in planning, and soldiers identified with the missions and goals of the unit.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, pp.51-52; he states that 33% was the goal, but proved unrealistic; numbers were more like 12-15%, or 18 to 25 soldiers. Since my colleague's unit was a "display" unit in the Beijing Military Region, it is probable that the percentage of Party members in his unit approached the goal. See also George, pp.194-195, on the shortage of Party cadres in the Korean War, even at the outset.

¹⁴⁷ Actually, this sounded too much like the ideal espoused in official ideology. The fact that officers preferred peasant recruits in part because they did not complain nor question orders as much as their urban counterparts indicated that officers preferred to work with authority and a fairly free rein in decision making. Nevertheless, this was the official ideology, and unilateral command decisions ultimately had to be justified to the Party committee.

This phenomenon was actually a characteristic of Chinese culture, according to my colleague. His observation about Chinese and American culture in this regard was that America seemed much more open and democratic in the broad sense--what he called *da qihou*, the "large environment." However, he felt that China, as the PLA reflected here, was much more open and democratic at the small, basic unit level--*xiao qihou*, the "small environment." To illustrate, he pointed out that Americans had much more political freedom, and many basic rights protected by the Constitution. Yet, Americans could lose their jobs quite spontaneously and summarily; and few American workers or soldiers had opportunity to criticize their leadership in their units, nor took part in the planning of their enterprises' or units' operations as their Chinese counterparts did regularly.

The Party committee, through the political commissar, took charge of political education in the unit. It recruited members from the unit; and the Party groups discussed most significant and mundane affairs which affected the company. Within the company, the Party groups were based on the platoons, one per platoon. My colleague believed that Party members in the PLA took their responsibilities very seriously--probably more seriously than most civilian Party groups did. Soldiers respected and looked up to Party members in the company. Members had superior status; they knew about important events before their fellow soldiers, and usually served as the first link of information for other soldiers. They also received first consideration for schools, training, and

promotion to the officer ranks. Party members had greater chances for re-enlisting and serving longer in the PLA.

The process of becoming a Party member was very long and drawn out. Prospective members must "apply"--they must write a statement explaining why they wanted to join the Party. People under the age of twenty-eight were first required to be Youth League members. The Party committee in the company reviewed the statement and one's performance. This latter review took place over the course of a year, at least; one's conduct and performance were scrutinized by committee members, the chain-of-command, and other Party members in the unit. Throughout this review period, one made continuous statements about one's purposes in seeking membership and self-criticism in squad meetings, political education training and other formats provided for this purpose. At the end of the first year, the platoon Party group reviewed the applicant's performance, and made a recommendation to the Party committee. The Party committee conducted an extensive political investigation, including writing letters to the soldier's village, commune, and county chiefs and Party committees, and parents, all of whom were required to respond in writing.

A Party meeting was held twice a year to discuss potential members--this was considered "recruiting" for Party membership; the initiative rested with the prospective member, who first had to apply. My colleague stated that nearly one hundred percent of soldiers in a unit applied for membership; so the Party hardly had to conduct any actual recruiting activities. Rather, their role

was akin to a winnowing process, eliminating candidates. A simple majority agreeing with the platoon Party group's recommendation was required in order to gain admittance. Rejected candidates could re-apply, and continue to perform up to standards, looking ahead to the next membership meeting, six months later.

Most Party hopefuls were rejected the first two or three times, and were strung along in this fashion as they sought membership and all of its benefits. Because soldiers needed to perform and conduct themselves extremely well throughout this process, membership became the proverbial "carrot on a stick" dangling in front of the soldiers and prodding them along the path of proper performance and behavior in the military. But the PLA was a good place for young people to enter the Party quickly. Many civilian candidates applied ten, twenty, or even thirty years consecutively before they either gained admission or gave up hope. According to my colleague, the PLA produced more Party members each year than the rest of Chinese society combined. This was a product of Mao's saying: "*Jiefangjun shige da xuexiao*--the PLA is a large school!"

The Party expected its members to display good work habits and to be good role models for the other soldiers.¹⁴⁸ They provided the example that the Party wanted soldiers to follow: hard-

¹⁴⁸ George, p.127:

The function of the Party soldiers was to take the lead in everything so as to set an example to the rest. In combat they stood foremost and at the retreat they followed last.

Chinese prisoner, private.

working, brave, obedient, uncomplaining, and committed to the Party. The atmosphere created by the Party in the unit was fairly stable; the greatest pressure rested on the Party members to provide the excellent example expected by the Party of its members. Since they received greater benefits from their membership, everything usually balanced out very nicely in the unit.

4.3 The Chinese Communist Youth League.

The Youth League was subordinate to the Party, submitted to its leadership, and supported its directives. The deputy political commissar supervised the Youth League, and chaired its committee. The rest of the board members in the Youth League were soldiers, besides the deputy political commissar; they were selected by their fellow members. Membership in the Youth League was the first step towards Party membership. Nearly ninety-five percent of all soldiers in the unit eventually became Youth League members.¹⁴⁹ The ages of League members ranged from fifteen to twenty-eight. Members were not Party members.

The League had two basic functions. First, it supported the Party's political education efforts by providing its members with materials, discussing Party documents, and taking part in other matters required by the Party. Second, the Youth League took charge of recreation and entertainment activities in the unit. These included: sports, music, movies, and holiday celebrations.

¹⁴⁹ Schurmann, p.568, notes: "Since the great majority of new veterans had been recruited into the Party or the Youth League during their military service, they already had cadre status when they returned home."

Units compete with other units in sports--companies against companies, battalions against battalions, etc. Most, if not all, of the PRC's national athletes came from the PLA.¹⁵⁰

Generally, the Youth League scheduled sports competitions and other activities during the week, and during the duty day; movies and similar activities occurred at night. Holidays and Sundays were reserved for the soldiers' free time, since they had so little free time in the first place, and had to do their laundry and write their letters. Leaders supposed that soldiers would use their free time productively doing these projects; so, they hesitated to take this time from their men unnecessarily. The League did schedule activities on these days occasionally; but these were not mandatory like the events scheduled during on-duty periods.

4.4 The Soldiers' Committee.

The third group in the company was the Soldiers' committee. This committee was not a Party organ. The Soldiers' committee was responsible for protecting soldiers' rights and welfare within the unit, inspecting food supplies and mess facilities, auditing the rations account used by the logistics officer, and making recommendations for improvement in any affair affecting the soldiers. The deputy commander was the chairman of the Soldiers' committee. In theory, all soldiers were members of this committee; in practice, all were actually members of a Soldiers' Assembly, which selected the members of the committee. Assembly and

¹⁵⁰ Young, chapter entitled "Athletes, Sharpshooters, and Generals."

committee members did not have to be Party members.

The Soldiers' committee protected soldiers from physical abuse and verbal abuse. This was the other form of redress of grievances open to soldiers.¹⁵¹ The PLA looked on this facet of military life very seriously. Officers were not allowed to strike soldiers, nor were they allowed to curse them. Recalcitrant soldiers and disciplinary problems usually received public sessions of "individual training": soldiers were called out in front of the whole company, made to perform certain tasks, and their deficiencies were pointed out to their peers; or else they were embarrassed publicly in other forms.¹⁵² Peer pressure

¹⁵¹ American soldiers have several channels by which they may redress grievances in the military. The first is the chain-of-command. A second channel, parallel to the chain-of-command, is the NCO support chain; in other words, a soldier may approach his company first sergeant or battalion sergeant major if he has a problem he feels that only they can resolve. Of course, the NCOs involved will ensure that the soldier first attempted to use his chain-of-command. A third channel is the battalion chaplain; I have had many soldiers approach the chaplain with complaints about some aspect of my unit which I had not heard about until the chaplain called me and offered his services to resolve some issue. A fourth channel is the military legal channels--judge advocate generals--which usually are used when a soldier has gotten into some form of legal/disciplinary trouble and hopes to deflect the consequences. A final channel is the Inspector General, who operates fairly independently, usually only accountable to the post commander. His functions approximate the Chinese Censorate--inspections, morale, welfare, and any other areas required by the post commander.

¹⁵² George, pp.86-87. DIA Handbook, p.5-28, section 5-52 lists the formal punishments available to commanders for various levels of infractions. Section 5-53 states:

The general principle behind punishment in the PLA is that offenders be taught the error of their ways. Minor offenses (drunkenness, failure to care for equipment) are usually dealt with at company-level criticism meetings. These meetings are attended by the accused soldier's

traditionally was a principal motive force behind social conformity and proper behavior in China. Accordingly, officers were not to abuse their soldiers, many of whom ranked as equals because of their Party member status. The Soldiers' committee mainly concerned itself with this function, and the supervisory role it had over mess operations and rations funds.

4.4 Yearly training cycle and military training.

Beginning in November, the yearly training calendar followed the pattern outlined below:

November--the recruiting season began; it ends in January.

October-February--Winter training period. The later months proved to be the best period, between December and February.

January--new recruits started basic training.

February--senior soldiers left the units to return to civilian life, towards the end of the month.

March-April--Spring planting season; summer uniform replacement issue.

May-July--summer training period, mostly marksmanship and other individual basic skills.

August-September--harvest period; Winter uniform issue.

As previously discussed night training received great emphasis in the PLA; traditionally, it was a tremendous strength for them against such foes as the United States, Japan, Russia, and India.¹⁵³ Most potential enemies for the PLA benefitted from

comrades and are presided over by the deputy commander of the company or the political officer. At the meeting the soldier confesses his crime and pledges to reform. The attenders discuss the nature of the offense and then decide on an appropriate punishment.

¹⁵³ George, p.174, underscores the total necessity for this technique, and it belies the notion that the PLA had a total advantage in this regard:

After they experienced combat with U.S.A. in Korea, all the

significant technological advantages; the PLA strove to reduce or eliminate these through effective night combat capabilities.¹⁵⁴ They were extremely effective against the United States in the Korean War for this reason.¹⁵⁵ At least one-third of PLA training was conducted at night. However, the PLA lagged behind other armies in their night-fighting technology--night vision goggles and

leaders up to and including the company commander proposed, at a meeting at the Regimental command post, that a recommendation be made to Premier Mao: "While the enemy can operate day and night, we have to fight only at night under various bad conditions. Such unfavorable conditions can be overcome only by reinforcements of airplanes and artillery. We hope such reinforcements will be given us as soon as possible." Such a recommendation was proposed not only once but each time when there was a meeting. Leaders of regimental commanders rank also agreed with our opinion and felt that they could not expect victory in their operations unless the problem was resolved....They [PLA leaders] tried to defeat the enemy's firepower with predominance of manpower. This was also the same tactic used in the last phase of the anti-Nationalist [civil] war. But I think such a military idea is no good....It was possible in the Chinese civil war but is impossible in a modern scientific war, I think. These views of mine were shared by most lower-level leaders and the men in the PLA, although they could not dare to make them public.

[assistant battalion political officer,
demoted to company political officer, 40th Army, 4th Field Army]

¹⁵⁴ Nelsen, "Organization," pp.79 and 82.

¹⁵⁵ English, pp.168-177. On p.169 he writes:

The Chinese entry into Korea was accomplished in outstanding military fashion. A misplaced Western trust in air surveillance ensured their achievement of total surprise when they eventually descended from the hills on road-bound UN forces in the autumn of 1950. Marching only by night and resting by day to avoid detection, the PLA managed to concentrate 300,000 troops in North Korean hills....Most movement was accomplished on foot, and one division at least averaged 18 miles a day for 18 days. The march normally began after dark around 1900 hours and ended at 0300 the following morning. During daylight, only scouting parties moved forward to select bivouac areas for the next day's rest. Strict camouflage and march discipline were rigidly enforced. All in all, it was a magnificent military feat.

sights, starlight scopes, infrared sights and rangefinders--which increased the night-fighting capacity of many potential foes profoundly.

Bayonet training was a favorite in the PLA. Leaders stressed it heavily because of their night combat emphasis--striking at night and having the capability for violent close combat made the Chinese infantryman a formidable opponent.¹⁵⁶ Instead of pugil sticks--sticks padded their entire length except on the handgrips--which were used by American forces for bayonet training, Chinese soldiers used wooden rifles with rubber tips which simulated the bayonet. They wore protective gloves, a helmet, and padding. Their techniques were not the broad strokes and over-powering thrusts used by American forces; instead, they relied on Chinese martial arts movements and patterns. Since they practiced

¹⁵⁶ English, p.172:

Contrary to many press reports, the Chinese in Korea did not employ "human sea tactics"....In reality, the Chinese Communists seldom attacked in units larger than a regiment, and even these were usually reduced to a seemingly endless succession of platoon infiltrations. According to the U.S. Marine Corps official history, it was not mass but deception and surprise that made the PLA a formidable opponent in the field. Individually, Chinese soldiers liked to get "in close," crawling toward the enemy under cover of darkness and then, to the blaring of bugles and shrilling of whistles, jumping up to hurl grenades and charge. Lightly equipped and clad, the Chinese infantryman was capable of great battlefield mobility. A master of stalking and fieldcraft technique, it was not uncommon for him to "rise out of the very earth" in the vicinity of UN positions, often around midnight, and launch--to the very great shock of all--a short, vicious surprise attack. Such offensive tactics prompted one American officer to describe a Chinese attack as a virtual "assembly on the objective." Masterful use of terrain, deception, infiltration during darkness, and close combat in which superior Chinese numbers were applied at vital points in the deep flanks and rear...was to spell disaster for many UN units and formations.

continually, he said that soldiers became extremely proficient; he believed that the American techniques were less effective.¹⁵⁷

Each year, the personnel turn-over rate equalled one-third of the force, roughly. Because of this heavy turn-over, which occurred at the same time each year, basic skills received the greatest emphasis in training. Most exercises conducted took place at regimental level or below. Officers needed to be very good trainers in order to teach so many new troops each year and to maintain any semblance of continuity in their units. PLA philosophy behind this system reflected the reliance that the PLA placed on militia and reservists, and the development of individual combat skills among this population. This added another piece of evidence illustrating the basic defensive nature of the PLA up to the time of this writing. In the 1980s, The PLA leadership placed much more emphasis on combined arms skills and operations.

¹⁵⁷ In the U.S. Army, emphasis on bayonet training has waxed and waned, depending on the prevailing philosophies in the Training and Doctrine Command. It must be admitted that the U.S. Army, especially during peacetime, does not place nearly the emphasis on bayonet training as the PLA, or the U.S. Marine Corps for that matter. Most soldiers are at least familiarized with the use of the bayonet. Soldiers are given spirited lectures, taught fundamental blocks and offensive techniques--butt strokes to various body parts, slashes, smashes, and thrusts; then they negotiate a difficult bayonet assault course strewn with obstacles amid the noise and smoke of battlefield simulators. Although I received pugil stick training at West Point, the regular Army, to my knowledge, has not conducted such training for several years. The typical bayonet fighter's litany:

"What's the spirit of the bayonet!" "To kill, sir!"
 "What kind of bayonet fighters are there?" "The quick
 and the dead, sir!" "What kind are you?" "The quick,
 sir!" "That's right! What about your enemy?" "The
 dead, sir!"

4.5 Company relations with local communities.

Units became involved in community projects in two ways. First, at the national level, whole units were involved--divisions, regiments, or battalions. These usually involved long-term projects; and needed approval at the highest levels of the military chain-of-command, often even from the Military Affairs Commission. The second type of involvement was at the local level, involving simpler, shorter term projects. In these cases, the leaders of the local government approached the local military commander through the local government's military department and requested assistance. The local unit still needed the approval of the next higher unit for these types of arrangements. Local governments also provided support to the military units in their areas, such as movies, theatrical performances and other types of entertainment; so the relationship was symbiotic, involving mutual benefit.

The "fish and water" concept was very important, as I previously discussed in Chapter One. At the company level, the major emphasis was focused on ensuring that the soldiers did not behave in a way which made them unpopular in the local community. Soldier contacts with the local community were very strictly limited. In general, contacts were only made on the official level, between the unit command and the local government; there were not many personal contacts. When the unit performed local community work, either in agriculture or construction projects, whole units were involved, employing soldiers under their natural

chains-of-command.¹⁵⁸ As a young soldier, my colleague worked on a project in a local village with his entire company. At one point, he was required to perform some work inside a peasant family's home, and they had a daughter approximately the same age--fifteen or so. While he worked, the girl came into the house, and began to question him about his life as a soldier. Almost immediately, the political commissar entered the house, and monitored his work for the rest of the day.

Time off-post was also exceedingly limited. As I noted above, soldiers did not have their evenings free, nor weekends, as American soldiers did. Sundays from nine a.m. to four p.m. were the only times when passes were normally authorized; only one-third of the soldiers in a unit could go at any given time. Soldiers were required to travel off-post in two-man teams, at a minimum; since shopping took up most of their pass time, they usually traveled in larger groups. This type of arrangement naturally reduced the possibility of contacts between soldiers and civilians, particularly with young women. My colleague could not recall any fights or other adverse incidents occurring between soldiers and civilians; nor did he recall any such incidents between soldiers from different units. Competition and rivalry between units was limited to training performance or sports and similar activities.

Conscripted, first-term soldiers were prohibited from marrying; recruiters ensured that soldiers were single, and that

¹⁵⁸ This is supported by discussions that I have had with LTC Peter Kozumplik, U.S. Army analyst on PLA affairs.

any fiancées left behind were amenable to a long-term separation and wait. Second and subsequent enlistees and voluntary soldiers were allowed to marry, but the process was fairly involved. First, they had to make a written application requesting permission from the company commander and the Party committee. Second, the fiancée was thoroughly investigated politically. Third, the regimental political department had to grant permission, after the company commander and political commissar and the company Party committee had approved; in order for the process to get to this point, the company had already made a positive recommendation to the battalion command element and regimental political department. Fourth, the fiancée had to pass a physical examination. Nevertheless, in spite of the rigmarole involved, my colleague stated that nearly every soldier who requested permission to get married was eventually able to do so. Most voluntary soldiers did get married, since they were on track to stay in their units for an additional four to six years. But in infantry units like his, the percentage of voluntary soldiers was extremely small; most voluntary soldiers were *tezhong bing*, and technicians involved in specially skilled occupations.

Local girls did not want to marry or get involved with conscripted soldiers in any case, because these soldiers had no guarantee that they would continue past their second year of service; then they normally returned to their home villages. A young woman facing this situation usually was in dire straits, since she was hardly making a step up economically, and she was leaving her family and support network behind. Voluntary soldiers,

obviously, made better choices economically; also, they were more likely to remain in the wife's village after their demobilization.

Officers made the best options for a local girl, because of their status, salary, benefits, and guaranteed state jobs should they depart the PLA. Officers rarely married prior to completing the basic officer's training school. Except for children of PLA officers who became officers themselves, most officers typically married women from their home villages or from the local area where the unit was stationed. The officers from military families normally married other children from PLA officer families.

One reason that my colleague gave for this was that people usually married people from the same status and background, or married higher up. That meant that an officer from a middle grade officer's family normally would marry only someone from a middle grade or higher grade officer's family. To marry down was considered strange; marrying up indicated that one had strong ambitions and good *guanxi*; marrying down seemed tantamount to a lack of ambition and potential. The other reason he gave was that PLA officers' children went to the same schools, on PLA bases, run by PLA personnel; so they developed friendships and interests in each other, including romantic relationships. Therefore, it was simply natural that officers from these families would marry spouses from these same families. By my colleague's estimate, ten percent of officers came from this background.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ This might be comparable to the percentage of officers from West Point in the U.S. Army officer corps; approximately one out of every six officers commissioned each year is an academy graduate,

4.6 Unit farm production.

One of the most fascinating features about the PLA was the unit farm production. As I discussed above, the basic grain ration for the PLA was fairly meager; the official standard of living equalled the average for the local area where the unit was stationed. But the PLA supplemented this standard with its own farm produce, called *fuye shengchan*, or "side production."¹⁶⁰ Units also raised livestock on these farms as well. This system went into effect by decree of the Defense Ministry early in the PRC's history; so it was not something done surreptitiously; rather, it was part of the Yanan legacy.

My colleague's farm, as a company commander, sat on ten *mou* of land--approximately one and two-thirds acres. Though seemingly not very large an operation to feed one hundred forty soldiers, when its produce was added to the company's shares from battalion, regiment, and division farms, each of which were separate from their subordinate units' farms, the yield was substantial. As I noted earlier, Edgar Snow reported one division's acreage in 1960 to be approximately 1700 acres. During harvest and planting seasons, the whole company turned out for work, minus those sent to help civilian farmers or higher level units with their farm work. Otherwise, duties rotated between the squads, usually just a few men per day. When he was a young soldier, his first duty was to feed pigs for three months. He had to forage for food, buy food,

according to the figures supplied to my class at West Point.

¹⁶⁰ Nelsen, "Organization," pp.70-71.

even scrounge food at restaurants for these pigs. A year later, his squad went to the unit's farm to work for three months. As a boy, his father, a PLA staff officer at a military region headquarters, sent him to pick up his father's share of farm produce: he brought back beef, pork, lamb, eggs, chicken, oil, vegetables, grains, and many other items. The unit farms provided excellent supplements to the basic standards of living officially allotted to soldiers by the PLA.

As I already alluded above, all units had their own farms--companies, battalions, regiments, divisions, armies, and district commands; headquarters units also had farms. Army and division farms were very large operations. Local armies and militia also had their own farms, separate from the commune farms. When one considered the amount of land sequestered by the PLA for its own purposes, one farm for each of these units, at every level, the numbers were staggering! At the outset, I noted that my colleague debunked the notion that the PLA was a "state within a state" as suggested by Jonathan Pollack. However, this aspect of the PLA provided great ammunition for Pollack's argument.

Whatever the true definition was for the PLA, it remained an engrossing institution in the PRC. The company served as a microcosm of that institution.¹⁶¹ The company was emphasized as the basic unit of army organization. General Xiao Hua's comments are most noteworthy:

The company is the basic combat unit. It must be tough

¹⁶¹ Gittings, pp.246-248.

*in the battlefield. It cannot do this if it does not have the strong leadership of the Party or the practical work of the Party branch....The quality of the work of a company depends on the work of its Party branch and on the role played by its Party members. The Party branch is the nucleus of leadership and unity of the company and is the company's fortress.*¹⁶²

Obviously, the company was the locus where all of the political battles ultimately worked themselves out. Its structure reflected the imprint of the Party and command structure at every level from district command; the company commander-political commissar relationship illustrated the all-important Party-command relationship at every level. The Maoist dictum about the Party, power, and the barrel of a gun--a dictum which grew out of the inseparable, indistinguishable history of the PLA and the CCP--found its roots in the ranks and files of PLA soldiers rushing out of the company barracks into the cold, crisp morning air to start another intense day of training. The PLA existed to serve the Party; and the Party existed because of the PLA. In the company, where the soldiers lived and worked, that primary relationship found its expression--down where, as American soldiers put it, "the rubber meets the road."

¹⁶² Gittings, p.247.

CHAPTER FIVE

Officers: The Heart of the PLA

5.1 Officer duties.

Duties for company officers were relatively simple. Basically, platoon leaders had four fundamental duties which occupied all of their attention. The first was establishing command and control over their platoon. Platoon leaders exercised great authority over their platoons, and they needed to learn the basic lessons of commanding and controlling their platoons. This meant learning to navigate; map reading; communications with their men and with their company commander; leadership techniques and experiences; these elements were essentially the same for American officers, although techniques and doctrine differed in most cases.

For instance, American units placed great emphasis on radio communications, and the increased lethality and range of modern weapons further dispersed units on the battlefield.¹⁶³ "Push-to-

¹⁶³ John Keegan, The Face of Battle, (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1989), pp.207-208. Keegan discusses the effect that machine guns had on the battlefield, and the increased dispersion of units caused by the effectiveness of modern weapons--a trend which has continued. As a mechanized infantry rifle platoon leader, I controlled four fifty caliber heavy machine guns--maximum effective range 1800 meters, and some armor piercing capability; five M-60 medium machine guns--maximum effective range 1100 meters, and excellent against light-skinned vehicles such as trucks, aircraft, as well as my most effective anti-personnel weapon; and four Dragon anti-tank missile systems--maximum effective range 1000 meters, and capable of destroying most tanks on the battlefield at that time (1982-83). In addition, my platoon had 36 assigned M-16 rifles--maximum effective range 460 meters; and five M-203 grenade launchers--200 to 300 meters, based on the target and purpose for firing. With the four M-113 armored personnel carriers I had--providing increased protection, mobility, and speed, my 25 to 35-man platoon matched or outgunned most 150 to 200-man companies of the World War II era. Later, when my battalion transitioned to the

talk" operations--conducted with units on the move, planning and coordinating tactics on maps over the radio--became increasingly important with the advent of the M-1 tank and M-2 Infantry Fighting Vehicle (IFV), the extensive defensive sectors of the NATO theater, and the magnitude of maneuver necessary in the Air-Land Battle scenario. Platoons and companies would operate seemingly unattached to battalions and brigades, because units in the same company often operated out of sight of other platoons. The two most important tactical skills necessary for American platoon leaders in this situation were good radio communications, and excellent navigational abilities. In one operation, we moved so fast attacking and pursuing the enemy that we ran out of map sheets for the operation--running right out of the maneuver area in three days, when seven or eight days had been planned.

PLA officers also needed to communicate with their commanders, navigate properly, and control their soldiers. But there was still an emphasis on the use of whistles, bugles, visual signals, and

M-2 Infantry Fighting Vehicle (IFV), one platoon's firepower, range, protection, speed and mobility out-distanced an entire mechanized infantry company outfitted with the weapons I listed above; and also outmatched any battalion from World War II. One platoon controlled the following armaments: four 25 mm chain guns, capable of killing any armored personnel carrier, and most tanks with flank or rear shots at ranges exceeding 2000 meters; TOW missile systems, capable of destroying any tank at ranges of 3000 meters and beyond; four coaxially mounted 7.62 mm machine guns--the same caliber as the M-60--on the IFV; plus the assortment of individual weapons and machine guns which we had in the old system. The events of the Persian Gulf War illustrated just how much faster and more lethal warfare is now at the company level than at any time previous.

other devices which had characterized the PLA tactics in Korea.¹⁶⁴ Only a small percentage of PLA officers were mechanized infantry officers; and they used the tactics and doctrine adopted from the Soviet Army. Therefore, platoon leaders operated on the receive mode, and could not clutter the command radio net. Light infantry units placed even less emphasis on the use of radios; even in the Sino-Vietnam War in 1979, PLA units resorted to the use of messengers and other simple forms of communication.¹⁶⁵ A crucial part of a junior officer's command and control techniques was the political indoctrination required by the political commissar and the Party. The platoon leader was responsible for this facet of leadership and interaction in his platoon as well, as discussed below.

Second was military training--basic soldier skills as well as unit exercises. Since the PLA had no non-commissioned officers, the platoon leader not only planned and supervised all necessary training for his platoon--the same as his American counterpart--but

¹⁶⁴ English, p.171, writes: "...The broken mountainous landscape, particularly on the east coast, severely restricted UN tactical wireless communications, while guerrilla remnants of the North Korean army and Chinese Communist infiltrators cut rear-area wire almost as fast as linesmen could lay them. An inability to communicate in moments of crisis spelled disaster for many an isolated UN platoon and understrength company. The Chinese, obviously, were not so critically affected, as their radio nets only extended down to regimental level and telephones only to battalions or occasionally to companies. Below battalion level, PLA communication normally depended on runners or such signalling devices as bugles, whistles, flares, and flashlights."

¹⁶⁵ Joffe, After Mao, p.95: "Tactical communications were so primitive that orders were transmitted by foot soldiers sent from division to division."

he also administered the training, and modeled the standards for his squad leaders and soldiers. He was the primary expert in his platoon, and the most experienced soldier.¹⁶⁶

Third, the platoon leader was responsible for political

¹⁶⁶ In the American Army, this was seldom the case. The average American platoon leader joined his platoon straight out of college or the Military Academy, was twenty-two years old, and had very limited experience with troops and sergeants. In fact, the first lesson that a new platoon leader needed to learn in order to succeed throughout his entire career was how to handle sergeants. If one was too authoritarian and arrogant, his sergeants usually let him sink; if too retiring and credulous, they might get away with murder. The platoon leader needed to demonstrate that he was in charge; qualified in the skills that he had already learned, but still teachable; and genuinely concerned for the welfare of his soldiers. The average platoon sergeant had ten to fifteen years experience, and realized that a large part of his unofficial duties revolved around training his new lieutenant how to lead soldiers and operate in the field. Most of these men were extremely competent, and interested in the welfare of their officers as well as the soldiers and the unit. Generally, they were the most expert soldiers in their platoons, and the models for the squad leaders, team leaders and soldiers, and strong supports for the young officer platoon leaders. The primary mentor and teacher for the platoon leader remained the company commander, usually a captain with five to ten years of military experience; but platoon sergeants spent more time with their lieutenants than did their commanders.

Of course, platoon leaders were expected to be models of excellence for their men, setting the standards in every area; but there still remained no substitute for experience. The first area where a lieutenant could make an impression--good or bad--was physical fitness training. A poor performance led to contempt and disrespect; troops expected their officers to be superior, and a source of pride for the unit. In the infantry, especially, running was the foundation for this program; so I didn't hurt my standings in the eyes of my soldiers when I won the division and community running championships three years in a row! Being Airborne and Ranger qualified, with those insignias on one's uniform, also commanded a modicum of respect, because soldiers knew that these awards didn't come easily; so officers wearing these badges, while not necessarily proving their competence as leaders, could, in effect, say, "I've been there." Eventually, though, one needed to prove oneself where it counted: in the field, leading soldiers. PLA platoon leaders, by virtue of their position, already had demonstrated their competence in this regard; so, they had an advantage in this area over their American counterparts.

education and Party affairs in his platoon. His platoon formed the basis for a Party group; his position as a member of the company Party committee placed the responsibility for the leadership of this group squarely on his shoulders. Thus, his political duties included recruiting for Youth League and Party membership within his platoon; administering and directing political education for his soldiers; supervising Party affairs, such as the group meetings, and Party discipline within the platoon. Even if a platoon leader was not a Party member--a rare occurrence--he still was accountable to the Party committee, and his performance was evaluated by the political commissar along with the commander. So, he had to ensure that these political duties were conducted at acceptable standards of performance.

Finally, platoon leaders handled the administrative matters of their platoons. These matters included: health and hygiene; inspections of equipment and uniforms; personnel functions, such as making recommendations for promotions, education, or documenting a soldier's performance in his personnel dossier. Disciplinary affairs were also handled by the platoon leader, in conjunction with the company commander; the latter had to approve any type of punishments for serious infractions within the unit.¹⁶⁷ Also

¹⁶⁷ Harvey W. Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, p.6; he states that the political commissar is responsible for discipline. My colleague agreed, but the commander was responsible also, and nothing happened without his approval in disciplinary matters. Nelsen writes elsewhere that "public shaming of men and officers largely substitutes for corporal punishment except in cases of severe infractions such as desertion." ("The Organization of China's Ground Forces," in Ray Bonds, editor, The Chinese War Machine, [London: Salamander Books, Ltd., 1979], p.74.) For a

included in these administrative matters were the simple affairs of daily life--food, formations and training schedules, supplies, and the like.

I told my colleague about the myriad extra duties which I had to perform for the company in the garrison environment, for example: unit safety officer; fire marshal; nuclear, biological and chemical warfare training officer; supply officer; motor officer; tax assistance officer; arms room officer; sanitation officer; *ad infinitum*, *ad nauseam*. The basic purpose behind these extra duties, besides ensuring that they were performed for the company, was to keep the lieutenant out of the platoon sergeant's and squad leaders' hair in the garrison environment, so that they could perform the functions which in the Army were called "Sergeants' business." (See my discussion of this at the beginning of Chapter Four). He said that these types of duties were performed by the unit logistics officer, under the supervision of the deputy commander. Platoon leaders were too busy with their platoons to bother with those functions, except as they impacted on their platoons.

Junior officers also did not perform duties such as staff duty officer--the practice of having a junior officer available at the

different formulation of the disciplinary system, see Ellis Joffe, Party and Army, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965), pp.58-68. His point is that the Party committee within the company is the final arbiter of nearly all matters in the unit one of the most important being discipline. This agrees with Nelsen's points noted above; thus, the system remained much the same throughout the 1960s and '70s. Note in particular the discussion beginning at the bottom of page 66 to page 68.

battalion, regimental and higher headquarters during off-duty hours, weekends and holidays. To him, such an arrangement was really unthinkable. Like companies, battalions, regiments and higher levels of command had four commanders: the commander, the political commissar, and their two deputies. To assign a junior officer to the battalion or regiment headquarters, even on a temporary basis, did not make sense, since any of these four persons represented the command element of the unit, and certainly one of them was readily available at all times. Likewise, at higher headquarters (regiment and higher), there were entire headquarters' staffs available to perform this function; so having a platoon leader or company commander or officer of equivalent rank from a subordinate unit represent the higher unit seemed inappropriate.

Duties for the company commander and the rest of the command element revolved around the same four fundamental duties as the platoon leaders. However, at the company level, a division of labor occurred, so that each of the four officers focused on a different facet of these duties, while the responsibility for accomplishing them all remained jointly on all four members. Therefore, the commander emphasized his role as the military commander by focusing on military operations and training; the deputy commander supported the commander in this role, and supervised all of the administrative functions, discipline, and logistics. As I noted above, he supervised the logistics officer in the execution of his support duties. The political commissar

obviously took charge of political education and Party affairs. His deputy managed propaganda affairs, cultural, social, and recreational activities, and all of the functions of the Youth League.¹⁶⁸

5.2 Selection and training.

From the 1950s until 1978, PLA officers were almost exclusively selected from the enlisted ranks. The reason for this was quite simple. From its inception, most of its highest ranking officers were promoted step-by-step from the ranks of peasant soldiers who joined the PLA and the CCP in the cause of the Communist revolution. Very few of these officers had any military education by way of schools. Instead, their training came in combat, against the KMT, Japanese, Americans, Indians, and so forth.¹⁶⁹

Learning from experience and practice was a basic tenet of PLA philosophy. One of the basic empirical and epistemological assumptions of the Maoist period was that good leaders began as good followers; a good general worked his way up the ladder of

¹⁶⁸ Ellis Joffe, Party and Army, pp. 59 & 66. He discusses the difference between theory and practice. Nelsen, in "The Organization of China's Ground Forces," implies that the system works a bit more smoothly than Joffe (pp.71-74). See also, Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, p.156. William W. Whitson, The Chinese High Command, p.186, gives an historical account of the system working at its best: the successful Huai-Hai campaign of 1948-1949, which destroyed a quarter of the KMT's remaining forces in the Civil War, and gave the Communists control of all of Central China north of the Yangzi River (p.185).

¹⁶⁹ My colleague related the figure of two hundred generals from the same county in Jiangxi province, all of whom had been with the CCP and PLA from the inception of the revolution as an illustration of the pervasive nature of this philosophy in the PLA.

command step-by-step from his foundation as a good soldier. Schooling did not produce officers; combat experience produced officers.¹⁷⁰ Much debate, conflict, and political struggle swirled around this theme; it was at the heart of the "red versus expert" controversy.

¹⁷⁰ This concept finds its parallel in the American assumptions about the non-commissioned officer corps. As one sergeant-major put it to me once: The American public has no problem understanding what a captain or a general symbolically represents, because our culture is filled with portrayals of these figures. Everyone has heard of Eisenhower, Bradley, Patton, MacArthur, Robert E. Lee, etc.; and they instinctively know that a captain is the head man, the boss, the "skipper." But for the common soldier, these figures are too distant for them to touch or identify with. They have a gut-level understanding of the roles, even as they realize the gulf that separates them. Soldiers have no gut-level understanding of sergeants, nor what they, as soldiers, can aspire to. This is one of the functions of the NCO. He provides a role model and an authority figure which the soldier can not only emulate, but also desire to become himself. The NCO is the success story from the soldier ranks. Of course, with Officer Candidate School (OCS), we have an equivalent "from-the-ranks-to-officership" track; but this is not the norm, and in order to climb above the lower officer ranks, an OCS graduate must attain a certain civilian and military education level not usually attained by enlisted soldiers nor NCOs.

But even at the NCO level, a high premium is placed on professional military education. The Army instituted a Non-Commissioned Officer Education System (NCOES) in the 1980s to ensure that all career NCOs received uniform professional training to enhance the skills which they obtained through training in their units. Promotions are contingent upon the successful completion of the preceding rank's schooling requirement. Corporals and junior sergeants attend Primary Leadership Development Course; senior sergeants and staff sergeants attend Basic Non-Commissioned Officers' Course; senior staff sergeants and sergeants first class attend Advanced Non-Commissioned Officers' Course; senior sergeants first class and master sergeants attend the First Sergeants' Course; and senior master sergeants and sergeants major attend the Sergeants Major Academy. Tied in with these professional schools are technical schools which train sergeants in their various specialties. For example, an NCO from an airborne unit might attend the Pathfinder (airborne reconnaissance) Course, or the Jumpmasters' Course (to master the techniques for supervising paratroop operations from the aircraft.)

The tensions and political struggles which this political-military dynamic engendered greatly affected Chinese society throughout the PRC's history, but particularly during the Cultural Revolution. My colleague literally grew up in the PLA. His father was a high-ranking officer in the PLA; he was able to influence his son's career as it developed in the 1970s. My colleague went to a school when he turned six years old, which was an elementary, junior middle school, and high school exclusively for the children of PLA officers. This school was staffed by PLA personnel, and many of its "graduates" went on to join the PLA in their pre- or early teen years--he joined when he was fourteen years old. So he saw many of the events of the Cultural Revolution unfold before his eyes. The following events he witnessed from the vantage point of his father's position in Beijing.

In 1967, in the Beijing Military Region headquarters, when he was twelve years old, he watched several officers at his father's headquarters building writing *dazibao*--big character posters--with the slogans: "Down with Yang Yong" and "Down with Zheng Weisan," among others. These two officers were the region commander and deputy commander. While he watched, the deputy commander walked out of the building; these junior officers began to denounce him as he walked by, and wrote their denunciations onto their posters. He watched on several occasions as senior officers wearing tall, conical "dunce caps" were paraded around Beijing by young officers. Some of these officers were forced also to walk across stages in auditoriums as part of struggle meetings, wearing the caps and

receiving criticisms, as well as criticizing themselves. He said that these events were really terrible things, and left a strong impression on him.

Another time, he remembered seeing his father and several other officers and soldiers guarding their headquarters building against seizure and ransacking by radical officer groups. He said that most of the officers in regular units in the PLA tried to protect their commanders and headquarters from these kinds of attacks. The bulk of members in the radical officer groups came from special units such as *wengongtuan*--cultural or performance units--and athletic units. These young people were actors or athletes, not professional military personnel; their units were controlled by propaganda departments with direct links to Jiang Qing and the Cultural Revolution Small Group.¹⁷¹ Ultimately, PLA career military officers influenced Mao to intervene within the PLA or face the prospect of a combat ineffective military--among other persuasions. As a result, in 1968, Mao declared, "Return my Great Wall!" and stated that the PLA would not participate in the Cultural Revolution. Afterwards, the young radical officers were drummed out of the PLA, during the latter part of the 1970s. From that time, the PLA became more and more involved in taking charge of the political situation in China, until after the Lin Biao affair, when the Party took measures to limit the military's control in political affairs. Nevertheless, the PLA remained

¹⁷¹ For a terse description of the political dynamics surrounding the Cultural Revolution within the PLA, see Nelsen, pp.102-107.

significantly involved in the political situation in China right into the 1980s.¹⁷²

Several criteria were used by company officers to evaluate their soldiers as potential officers. The first was an excellent service record as a soldier for the initial two-to-three year enlistment period. Second was demonstrated leadership potential. As a soldier rose in seniority among his peers, he might be selected as a squad leader or deputy squad leader, usually the latter, then the former. The next criteria tied in closely with the second: the performance of his squad under his leadership. The performance of one's unit was a major factor at any level of leadership in the evaluation of one's personal performance and qualifications for advancement.

Fourthly, a positive political attitude and behavior was extremely important. With a few exceptions, officer candidates should have been Party members. A fifth factor frequently used was whether the soldier had been selected for further service as a "voluntary soldier." Finally, a soldier needed to be professionally competent in basic soldier skills, and able to teach these to other soldiers. Obviously, performance and political reliability were the most important factors considered.

I asked my colleague about testing to select officers from the civilian ranks, such as the Qing and other dynasties used alongside their official examination system for government officials. He

¹⁷² Ellis Joffe, The Chinese Army After Mao, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp.19-23.

said that this type of system was scorned by the PLA as superficial. The Qing favored such qualities as strength, martial skills like swordsmanship, and courage as criteria for selecting their junior officers. He felt that the criteria discussed in the section above were much more effective than these more superficial criteria of the imperial period in evaluating potential officers; a test of physical skills could never equal the day-to-day observation by unit officers of a soldier's performance with his unit in times of peace and war.

Once soldiers were selected as officer candidates, they were sent to their army's instruction brigade. Usually, each army had such a unit. Training lasted from six months to one year for junior officers--those returning to their units as platoon leaders, logistics officers, deputy company commanders, or deputy political commissars (for a company). Training included refreshers in all of the soldier basic skills, with an emphasis on being able to teach these skills to soldiers. Also included were basic tactics; basic command combat skills like map-reading and land navigation; platoon and company organization and how to organize these units from scratch and lead them; and basic military history.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ My colleague told me that Soviet Army World War II experience greatly influenced his training. He was amazed at the outcome of the Persian Gulf War, and felt that the PLA would be revolutionized by its effects. He said that he argued unsuccessfully in the early 1980s, while in graduate school, for the PLA to move away from the Soviet influence towards a more technologically advanced army. What surprised and dismayed him about the Iraqi performance was the fact that they also were strongly influenced by the Soviets. He told me that if he had been a commander defending in the desert, he probably would have executed a defense similar to the Iraqi defense; likewise, he

Administrative skills, and the laws governing the military in peace and war, rounded out the training. This last component involved only PRC laws governing the military; international laws, such as the Geneva and Hague conventions--which were taught to American officers--were not studied. Candidates were required to successfully complete every item in the training regimen.

Once an officer candidate completed his training, he returned to his unit, at least to the parent battalion or regiment, and often to the company from which he was selected. This implied strong accountability to the parent unit by the officer candidate, and increased his incentive to succeed. The cohesion of the parent unit increased due to this accountability, and relationships and the responsibilities of these relationships among officers in the unit were strengthened by this system.¹⁷⁴ This system was

believed that the PLA as an army would have done the same as the Iraqi army. And like the Iraqi army, he feels sure that the PLA inevitably would have received the same beating. About two weeks after he told me this, the New York Times ran an article which said the same thing about the PLA and their reactions to the Gulf War. (See "War Astonishes Chinese and Their Military," New York Times International, Wednesday, March 20, 1991, p.A7.)

He gave me the following examples of Soviet and World War II-style materials which officer candidates and PLA units received for study as representative of modern warfare: books by Marshal Zhukov; Soviet war movies, such as "Liberation"--an 8-hour movie--and "Siege"--a 6-hour movie on the Battle of Leningrad; the American movies "Patton" and "MacArthur." He said the movies were valued for their "graphic" depiction of "modern" warfare. (His emphasis: "...").

¹⁷⁴ In contrast, the U.S. Army has spent a lot of resources in its Officer Professional Management System to eliminate the "good ol' boy" network which characterized the years between the two world wars and earlier. Some of this networking still exists, at least in the suspicions of those who closely follow promotion lists and try to determine the common factors found in those officers fortunate enough to be selected for promotion ahead of their peers.

characteristic of Chinese society in general, and reflected the unique Chinese nature of the PLA, despite its Marxist-Leninist and Soviet Army influences.¹⁷⁵

In the American military academies, the dropout rate is approximately thirty-three percent.¹⁷⁶ The failure rate in the PLA's officer training brigades was a small fraction of that--perhaps less than one percent of the officer candidates who

The most commonly berated suspects for this type of networking are the Ranger battalions and the 82nd Airborne Division. My personal view is that the elimination of all of this subjectivism is not only impossible and impractical, but also not in the best interests of the military. Great military leaders are not great simply in the measurable and quantifiable areas, but also in the intangible areas which can only be judged subjectively. George Washington, Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson and Joshua Chamberlain all demonstrated integrity and character which magnified their greatness as generals; such qualities cannot be adequately judged by a panel of officers sitting in Washington, D.C., who have never met most of the thousands of officers whose files they review for promotion. Harvey Nelsen discusses this aspect of the American Army briefly in The Chinese Military System, p.155.

¹⁷⁵ Professor Donald Munro brought this characteristic of Chinese society to my attention. The Chinese define an individual's identity not by his distinct traits observable apart from other people, as we define identity in the West. Instead, they describe a person on the basis of his relationships with the people around him--whose child he is; whose husband; whose parent; whose employer or employee. One's identity is wrapped up in the community and the society in which he lives.

¹⁷⁶ Shortly after I entered West Point in the summer of 1977, our entire entering class of fifteen-hundred-plus was seated in the big auditorium in Thayer Hall, listening to the commandant of cadets. He told us to look to our right and left. Seated on my right and left were my two roommates. The general then told us that one of the three people, represented by ourselves and the persons on our immediate right and left, would be gone by the time that our class graduated four years hence. By the first week of my freshman school year that Autumn, both of my roommates were gone, and I quickly deduced from the commandant's reassuring words that my remaining time at the Academy was going to be a piece of cake. We did graduate with approximately 960 members, or roughly the two-thirds that the general promised us.

entered. The reasons reflected the care taken by units to select their officers, and the determination of these soldiers not to lose this opportunity to rise above their doleful peasant backgrounds. Only about one percent of soldiers were selected for the officer ranks, and the competition was very stiff. Soldiers worked very hard just to be selected; their habits paid off in their officer training.¹⁷⁷ The Chinese concepts of "face" and "saving face" played a role in this low failure rate as well; there was a remarkably strong motivation to succeed so that one did not disappoint those people counting on one's success, and making sacrifices to aid in that success.¹⁷⁸

The selection to the junior officer ranks was an extremely coveted track to success for most Chinese, and garnered an individual great prestige and material benefits, as I noted in Chapter Three. Even if an officer was discharged from the PLA, the

¹⁷⁷ My experience with former enlisted men who had entered the Military Academy echoed this tendency for excellence by experienced PLA officer candidates. If the cadets with prior enlisted service made the determination that they would not be frustrated by the internal realities and eccentricities of cadet life, they generally outperformed their peers who arrived at the academy straight out of high school. Their older age, and the discipline and work habits picked up in the military simply gave them an advantage in maturity which most of us had not yet come to grips with, since we had never been away from home and had not faced so many decisions on our own before West Point.

¹⁷⁸ Dr. Michel Oksenberg pointed out that failure rates are low anywhere in Chinese society, for this very reason. Professor Norma Diamond noted that in traditional times, sometimes whole villages or clan associations jointly sponsored a promising young man in his studies so that he could achieve success in the difficult Imperial examination system. Later they expected him to remember favorably those who aided in his successful climb into officialdom; failures and ingrates were disdained as persons of low character and integrity.

government guaranteed him a government job on the outside; so a successful officer candidate appeared to be set for life economically--a far cry from the subsistence-level existence of the average peasant. Even after 1985, peasants still sought this path to success very eagerly. My colleague felt that this incentive greatly enhanced discipline within his unit, and accounted for the remarkable lack of disciplinary problems within the PLA as a whole. Even those soldiers limited to one enlistment period received benefits which were not available to eighty to eighty-five percent of the Chinese population otherwise.

In my colleague's experience, not one soldier offered the chance for officer training ever turned down the opportunity. If a soldier accepted such an appointment, he incurred another three years of service, minimum, even if he failed as an officer candidate; however, most officers stayed in the PLA as long as possible, so this new three year commitment was generally just a formality. Most officer candidates were selected from second-term enlistees, usually between the third and fourth year of service; very few were selected from outstanding first-term privates. Thus, a sort of winnowing process existed, in which a percentage of soldiers were selected from the first term soldiers for reenlistment to a second term; then, from that number, usually one or two were selected as officer candidates.

5.3 Officer schooling and professional education.

We discussed the professional education system for officers in two phases: pre-1978, and post-1978. The system did exist before

1978; however, only two types of schools existed, and probably less than twenty of these schools served the entire PLA structure prior to 1978. Since 1978, however, the PLA has established a large number of schools--more than one hundred--and these schools were oriented towards three levels of officers, and towards a variety of specialty needs. This variety included infantry, anti-aircraft, missile, radar, communications, engineering, armor, and naval and air force schools, and other special technical schools; the PLA began to place a greater emphasis on combined arms operations along with these schools and other reforms which accompanied Deng's rise to power.

The pre-1978 system's two types of schools trained officers on two levels. The first level was the primary school, the vast bulk of which were infantry schools for junior officers who had finished their platoon leader, company commander, or equivalent position service. These officers were trained for one to two years, then they returned to their units, at either the army or division level. There, they performed as instructors at the unit's instruction brigade, training officer candidates. Generally, former platoon leaders and company commanders were selected for this type of duty. Some graduates of the primary schools went to division, army, or even district command staffs. The graduates of these primary schools were considered the elites of the PLA's junior officer levels. The shortage of these schools, and the enormous number of officers in the PLA caused these school slots to attain a high premium in the career opportunities of junior officers. My

colleague estimated that only five percent of junior officers received primary schooling prior to 1978; more than ninety-five percent received training at the division or army officer candidate instruction brigades.

The second type of school in the pre-1978 period was the advanced military school. These schools trained mid-level officers--battalion, regiment, and sometimes division commanders and their deputies, and officers in positions of equivalent position and rank. These schools lasted one to two years. Graduates usually received promotions to higher ranks and positions immediately. Much of the training at these schools was specialized and focused on the duties and responsibilities which the officers would face in their next assignments and in their basic specialties. For example, a pending regimental commander received instruction concerning command at the regiment and division level; his instruction was in some ways similar to a regimental-level political commissar; but there were also great differences in their training based on the different natures of their commissar and command roles.¹⁷⁹ Less than ten percent of the mid-level officers received this schooling. Before 1978, most officers at this level were "old soldiers" from the old school, meaning that they had a lot of combat experience, and little formal education.

My colleague said that these officers' experience was still valid for combat situations like insurgencies, guerrilla movements,

¹⁷⁹ Harvey W. Nelsen, "The Organization of China's Ground Forces," pp.71 & 74. Professor Nelsen explains that the commander has much more intensive military training than does the commissar.

revolution, and even short-term engagements against a weaker foe in a limited warfare environment. But in the light of recent events, on a long-term basis, against a powerful and intractable enemy, these officers were ill-equipped to fight modern warfare in a combined arms, air-land battlefield environment.¹⁸⁰

Beginning in 1978, the PLA reformed its officer education

¹⁸⁰ Some of their usefulness in the former situations must be challenged, also, since they were largely unprepared for the type of warfare that they encountered in Vietnam in 1979. One of the more interesting conversations that we had was about the PLA's Vietnam War. My colleague remarked that they thought that the Vietnamese would meet them on the battlefield, where the PLA felt that they had a considerable advantage. Instead, the Vietnamese fought a guerilla-style campaign, and fought it out of the miles of tunnels and underground fortifications which they had built during the wars against the French and the Americans. So, they kept popping up in the PLA rear, causing the Chinese severe problems. This conversation begged the question: Why on earth didn't the PLA leadership, trained and experienced in exactly this type of warfare--Ho Chi Minh and Giap learned much of their tactics and strategy from Mao's writings and from training and combat experience with the PLA--expect this type of response by the Vietnamese? They had watched the Vietnamese bloody the French and Americans for twenty-some years; didn't they think the Vietnamese would continue to utilize such successful tools against yet another invading foreign giant? But, as LTC Peter Kozumplik, U.S. Army PLA analyst, told me, the PLA's junior officers performed extremely well in this war, and did not let themselves become fettered by doctrine nor the poor strategy of the PLA high command. Both he and my colleague pointed out that the PLA still accomplished their missions and achieved their objectives apparently on schedule. Though chagrined by the exceedingly difficult time they had with the Vietnamese, my colleague bluntly stated that the PLA leadership did not consider their efforts a total failure. He said that Americans focused on the wrong elements--i.e., casualty figures. By the Chinese way of thinking, such calculations were not even an issue, neither traditionally, nor under the CCP. The Korean War, he said, served as further evidence of this point. Finally, the fact that Chinese forces still hold Vietnamese territory along the Sino-Vietnamese border, continue to fire artillery rounds into Vietnam regularly, and conduct live combat patrols, and raids up to regimental size inside Vietnam all indicated that the PLA did not consider the 1979 Vietnam War a total failure, as many Western analysts have stated.

system. In addition to adding the schools, the selection process for officer candidates also changed; this change came in 1980. Officers still came from the soldiers' ranks; but officers also came directly from student ranks within the new military schools, which were similar to the American military academies. These students were mostly high school graduates recruited for the military schools from their homes. Soldiers selected for officer candidacy now attended these primary military colleges instead of the army and division instruction units. These primary military colleges educated the new officers for three years, then the graduates shipped out to their new units.

In 1985, the PLA decided that all of its junior officers needed military school education; without this schooling, one was not qualified to be an officer in the PLA. Since this reform was instituted, nearly all junior officers have three years of primary military school education--a dramatic shift away from the five percent of the pre-1978 PLA!¹⁸¹ This education process began in 1978, but the PLA did not fully implement it until 1985.

The three types of schools instituted since 1978, which I mentioned at the beginning of this section, include the primary military colleges discussed above; advanced military colleges (or

¹⁸¹ Chong K. Yoon, "Problems of Modernizing the PLA: Domestic Constraints," in Larry M. Wortzel, editor, China's Military Modernization, p.4. In discussing the educational modernization efforts of the PLA, Professor Yoon writes: "...Officers are expected to attend a military academy or an institution where they successfully complete officer training or a college or special technical secondary school....All chief officers in the combat troops are to receive higher education by the end of the year 2000."

commanders' colleges); and a National Defense University. The National Defense University, created in 1985, combined the PLA Military Academy and the PLA Logistics Academy--two of the advanced military colleges of the earlier period.¹⁸² The advanced military colleges trained battalion and regimental level officers; their periods of instruction lasted one to two years, depending on the officer's specialty; graduates attained the equivalent of a master's degree in their fields of study--similar to the attainments of American officer graduates of the Command and General Staff College, the Army War College, and the National Defense University.

Officers of pre-1978 vintage, if still junior officers when these reforms took effect, generally were replaced by the newer generation of officers coming in under the new education system. If these pre-1978 officers were of higher rank and position, then they were given opportunities to catch up with their more educated peers. The rationale behind this move seemed to be that these higher ranking officers had already exhibited outstanding potential and performance, so keeping them best served the PLA's interests. These officers were sent to the advanced military colleges; if they completed the curriculum successfully, then they moved along in the system just like their more educated peers.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Yoon, pp.4-5. He further states that three-fourths of the students in this school are senior PLA officers; the remainder are high-level Party and government cadres.

¹⁸³ Yoon, p.2. "...The leaders in Beijing have first begun to concentrate on the reform of the non-material side of the military by pruning the size of the PLA, rejuvenating military cadres, and

Selection as an instructor in one of these schools, like selection for attendance as a student, was highly coveted in the officer corps. Instructor assignments included many benefits, including increased opportunities for promotion and command. Officers on faculty in these schools were considered among the cream of the crop in the PLA. Military staff and faculty personnel actually coming out of the PLA to these schools represented only a small percentage of the entire staff and faculty. Technically, my colleague said, all of the staff and faculty personnel were military; however, the majority had no combat or field experience. Some transferred directly from civilian universities, where they had formerly been employed; others came directly out of graduate school, recruited by the PLA as instructors in their fields of study.

My colleague stressed that while uniformity of doctrine was the goal in these schools, the PLA did not want to produce officers who were tied dogmatically to following doctrine regardless of the situation. Flexibility in the application of strategy, doctrine, and tactics was a major tenet of PLA philosophy.¹⁸⁴ In this

raising the educational and technical training level of the officers and men....The factors the government used to cut the size of the military were age, health, education, politics, and competency."

¹⁸⁴ William Whitson makes this argument in his book, The Chinese High Command, (New York: Praeger Press, 1973). He points out that three models of military ethic and style--warlord, Russian, and peasant--strive with one another and compromised with one another for more than forty years--1928-1971--to find the right balance for the PLA. (p.23) Due to this tension and compromise, and the influence of Sun Zi's The Art of War, as well as the varied combat experiences of those years, the PLA could hardly be accused

regard, they effectively avoided the problems of doctrinal rigidity, which many American military analysts considered a glaring defect in the Soviet system.¹⁸⁵ The education system still bore a strong orientation towards rote memorization, however. Students did not receive many books on their various subjects; but they were expected to thoroughly assimilate all of the sources required for a subject. As my colleague put it, they were expected to be quite familiar with their books from cover-to-cover. After,

of doctrinal rigidity.

Observations of the Sino-Vietnamese War also bear this out. LTC Peter Kozumplik told me that especially at the lower levels--below division level--commanders and soldiers in Vietnam displayed a striking capacity for adapting to the exigencies of the situation and adopting anything which worked. He said that if they tried something taught at their military schools or in their units, and it did not work for them, then they quickly discarded it and tried something else. If that did not work, then they quickly moved to a third option. When they found something that effected success for them, they stayed with it until its efficacy was used up. Therefore, even though their entrance-level skills and doctrine were inadequate for the missions and circumstances of the Sino-Vietnamese War, PLA infantrymen swiftly adapted to their environment; despite the disastrous outcome for the PLA at the operational and strategic levels, these soldiers on the ground were formidable opponents. Vietnamese casualties numbered in the tens of thousands in that month-long campaign.

¹⁸⁵ One such criticism which I heard in the course of my own military education concerned the Soviet Army's strategy in Afghanistan. For whatever reasons--perhaps the Soviets really were not concerned about the outcome in Afghanistan, or felt that the situation was never really out of control (two explanations I have listened to in the course of discussions about the Soviet fiasco in Afghanistan)--Soviet leadership at nearly every level of command in Afghanistan remained doctrinally rigid in their approach to fighting the Afghan *mujihadeen*. No significant breakthroughs in tactics or doctrine occurred for nearly seven years, until Soviet airborne forces and helicopters were extensively utilized in the fighting; they showed impressive flexibility in their approach to combat, and were extremely effective against the *mujihadeen*. But by the seventh year of the war, a terrible toll had been exacted on the Soviet economy, as well as on the Soviet image abroad; at that point, it was too late for the Soviets to win the war.

further reflection, he agreed with me that this factor also figured in the length of the schools, which were significantly longer than their comparable American counterparts.¹⁸⁶

4 Officer promotions and career paths.

In the 1950s and early '60s, promotions followed the Soviet Army pattern--a promotion came generally every three years. In 1965, the rank system was completely scrapped by the PLA as part of the "red versus expert" debate going on in the military and Chinese society at large.¹⁸⁷ The PLA officially had no rank system until 1985. My colleague said that promotions followed no regular pattern during those years, 1964-1985. He knew of officers remaining in their same positions for ten, fifteen, even twenty years, while other officers rose to company or even battalion

¹⁸⁶ Many American officers who have either sponsored Allied officers at American military schools or attended military schools in primarily Third World countries can identify with this supposition. At the Infantry Officers' Basic and Advanced courses, I sponsored officers from African countries who were numbed by the pile of books issued at the beginning of the courses. When I learned that they balked at the idea of reading and memorizing all of those books, with English often not their native language, I quickly re-assured them that they simply needed to learn how to use the materials as references; no one expected them to read all of them! Many Allied officers, however, never quite got the knack of using books solely as references; and no one could possibly read and understand all of the technical information in all of those books, whether Allied or American. The American officers attending Third World military schools encountered just the opposite problem; and they, too, often balked at the prospect of using a foreign method to learn foreign military doctrines in a foreign language.

¹⁸⁷ For a better treatment of this "red vs. expert" subject, see Ellis Joffe, Party and Army, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965); or Whitson's The Chinese High Command; or James D. Jordan, "The Maoist Versus the Professional Vision of a People's Army," in William Whitson, editor, Military and Political Power in China in the 1970s, (New York: Praeger, 1972), p.25 and following.

command in just two or three years from the time that they were selected to become officers. He knew soldiers who rose from basic recruits to company commanders in the space of two years. One regimental commander that he personally knew had commanded the same regiment from age thirty-five to age fifty.¹⁸⁸ The lack of any systematic process for promotion translated into the PLA being, on average, older than any other army in the world.¹⁸⁹ Since 1985, he said, the PLA reverted back to a systematic promotion process; on average, officers waited three years for promotions.

One of the ways that the reforms dealt with this problem was to implement age limits for each position in the PLA. (See footnote 21, above). First of all, a soldier could not be older than twenty-three to be eligible for selection as an officer. Platoon leaders had a maximum age limit of twenty-eight; after this age, if

¹⁸⁸ Nelson, pp.75, 148-150. Professor Nelson recounts the ideological battles of the Cultural revolution, which encouraged some ambitious and politically zealous soldiers to question authority and to defy orders which they believed to be politically incorrect. He termed these fast risers "the children's corps" or "helicopters"--the nicknames given to "young, bold political activists who were suddenly vaulted to high level positions; in one case from a squad leader to the director of a regimental political department."

¹⁸⁹ I do not have any way to verify this as fact; however, the PLA had grave problems with senior officers who simply would not retire, and kept the cap on the top ranks, so that very few officers--only the exceptions--could rise to the highest levels. One of the reforms implemented by the PLA after 1978 was to retire large numbers of senior and aged officers. This information was related to me in conversations with LTC Peter Kozumplik, U.S. Army PLA analyst, at the Defense Language Institute, Monterey, California, 1988-89. The Chinese short story and movie by the same title, "Ren Dao Zhong Nian," or "People at Middle Age," by Chen Rong deals with the same phenomenon in Chinese society at large--one of the legacies of the Cultural Revolution.

not promoted to the next rank, then they were removed from the position and de-activated. Company commanders stretched this age limit out to thirty years of age. The official age limit for battalion commanders was thirty-five; for regimental commanders was forty; for division commanders was forty-five; fifty for army commanders; and fifty-five for district commanders. In practice, these age limits were not strictly applied; so age ranges actually applied: battalion commanders ranged from age thirty to age forty; regimental commanders from thirty-five to fifty; and division commanders from forty-five to fifty-five. However, these age reforms served their prescribed purpose: to rejuvenate the aging PLA officer corps; their impact was strongly felt.¹⁹⁰

Before 1985, the factors considered for promotion fell into

¹⁹⁰ In my conversations with LTC Kozumplik, he reported that since 1985, the PLA generally has 45-50-year old division commanders, 40-45-year old regimental commanders, 35-40-year old battalion commanders, and 25-30-year old company commanders; platoon leaders generally are under 30. These ages match their American counterparts fairly well. I led my two platoons while I was between the ages of 22 and 24; I commanded my company from age 27-29; my three battalion commanders ranged in age from 38 to 46; and my brigade and regimental commanders ranged from 42 to 48. A very successful officer generally pins on his first star at twenty-five years of service; so the average officer graduating from a military academy or ROTC at age 22 would be 47 when he became a brigadier general, and approximately fifty when he commanded at the division level. General officer promotions tend to be more affected by retirements and national policy--such as General Alexander Haig going from the White House to the NATO command without any intermediate general officer commands; or General Colin Powell leaping over several senior officers from the three-star, National Security Advisor position to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff--so, age limits are less meaningful at this level. As a rule, all other military personnel must retire after thirty years of service, although exceptions are made regularly for colonels, chief warrant officers, and sergeants major; thirty-five years is seldom surpassed by those granted an exception at thirty years.

four main categories: personal and unit performance; political behavior and beliefs; family and class background; and one's relationships with other officers, both peers and superiors. Since the reforms, educational background has been included on the list; and family and class background and political behavior and beliefs diminished somewhat in their importance, although they did not disappear by any means. As with the selection process for officer candidates, performance and political reliability were the two most important factors, and remained so after 1985.

Platoon leaders should have commanded their platoon for two to three years to be considered for promotion to company command or schooling opportunities. If one's unit performed well, this reflected excellent leadership skills on the part of the platoon leader. The military training record of troops was evaluated: marksmanship, basic skills tests, and the outcomes of unit exercises. The latter involved tasks such as moving the unit from one point to another in a given time period; engaging opposing forces; encountering and breaching obstacles such as barbed-wire or minefields; and unit live-fire exercises.¹⁹¹ Simply put, one needed to demonstrate that he was an expert platoon leader in order

¹⁹¹ The PLA used written manuals with scenarios, missions, and the required standards for successful completion. This is similar to what the U.S. Army calls an ARTEP--Army Readiness and Training Evaluation Program--which is found in various ARTEP manuals depending on the type and size of unit. These manuals outline scenarios, tasks, conditions, and standards for the various missions from squads to divisions; they are used to uniformly evaluate and maintain the readiness of units according to Army doctrine based on the combat experience and history of its units and personnel, as well as its vision of future warfare scenarios.

to advance to the next level of command.¹⁹² Only the very best

¹⁹² One command sergeant major with whom I had the pleasure of working during my company command time in the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard), in Washington, D.C., remarked on the lack of expertise in the various leadership positions of the U.S. Army. In his opinion, leaders should not be promoted until they have demonstrated expertise in every facet of their current leadership position. His feeling was that company commanders, who have the primary responsibility for training platoon leaders, ought to have been expert platoon leaders themselves. Battalion commanders should have been expert company commanders; regimental or brigade commanders should have been expert battalion commanders; and so on. In both the NCO positions and the officer positions, he observed that this expertise for the previous level of command/leadership was seriously lacking. He attributed this lack to the system which forced soldiers to move up quickly in the ranks or be discharged from the military; and the Army's requirement that every soldier--NCO or officer--hold leadership or command positions as prerequisites for promotion. Since the Army structure did not have enough slots to allow everyone command or leadership experience unless these positions were held only briefly by each soldier, soldiers were short-changed on the time required to learn to be experts in their positions. He pointed out that the average lieutenant led only one platoon for an average of twelve months, and the average captain commanded a company only once in a career, for approximately twelve to eighteen months. These twenty-four to thirty months had to serve such an officer throughout the remainder of his career as the foundation of his command expertise; company commanders generally complete their commands by their eighth year of service, and will not command again until they are battalion commanders--at approximately their eighteenth year of service. Magnifying the deficiency was the lack of combat experience for the vast majority of leaders who entered the Army between 1973 and 1990; errors made in Grenada, Beirut, and Panama all reflected the lack of combat experience on the part of leaders in all branches of the service, as review of the Persian Gulf War is certain to do as well.

The issue can be examined indirectly in the U.S. Army by focusing on the length of time that the subjects of the following works actually spent as "company-grade" officers serving in troop assignments:

Frank E. Vandiver, Mighty Stonewall, (College Station, Texas: Texas A & M University Press, 1957);

Major General Aubrey "Red" Newman, USA (Retired), Follow Me, (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1981);

Anton Myrer, Once An Eagle, (New York: Berkeley Medallion Books, 1968). It might also be noted that such famous generals as Erwin Rommel, Dwight Eisenhower, George Patton, and Omar Bradley were only mid-level field-grade officers--lieutenant colonels or majors--at the outset of World War II, although they all had begun

platoon leaders were selected for company command; and the process of moving up in the ranks was often long and slow, especially during the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath when officers at the higher levels seldom retired and there was little room for upward movement.

Politics--behavior and belief--was probably the most important single factor dealing with promotion in the PLA prior to 1985, particularly during the Cultural Revolution when the radical Maoists--the "red" side of the "red vs. expert" conflict--wielded so much power. Loyalty to the CCP was very important; therefore, unlike the Soviet Army, where political control was considered necessary, but room remained for a politically neutral or aloof military professionals, the PLA required proper political expression on the part of its officers.¹⁹³ This type of political emphasis proved to be very troublesome for the PLA in developing an officer corps and a military which were technically competent and sufficiently schooled in the operational art to face the immanent military threats which the PRC encountered during its first thirty

their military careers either before or during World War I--twenty or more years earlier; the majority of these years was spent in the company-grade ranks, in multiple command and leadership experiences. Rommel's classic Attacks, (Vienna, Virginia: Athena Press, Inc., 1979), which "electrified" George Patton when he read it in 1943 (p.v), discusses only Rommel's experiences, tactics, and lessons of combat at the platoon, company, and battalion levels during World War I.

¹⁹³ Much of my discussion about Soviet military realities comes from comparing my research and ideas with the research and expertise of Captain Albert Zaccor, a U.S. Army Soviet Union analyst. His graduate studies in Soviet Union and Eastern Europe at the University of Michigan paralleled my Chinese studies.

years.¹⁹⁴ Obviously, the political commissar's function was

¹⁹⁴ The subject of the politicizing of the PLA is beyond the scope of this paper. An understanding of it is crucial, however, to trying to understand the whole phenomenon of the Cultural Revolution, Party control in China, and how the Party has used and will use the PLA for its purposes in retaining power in China. I suggest a sequential reading of the following works to place this topic in an historical-evolutionary framework:

(1) Mark Selden, The Yenan Way in Revolutionary China, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971). While I disagree with Mr. Selden's conclusions about the Chinese Communist Revolution, I did find his description of the birth and organization of the CCP-Red Army/PLA military state which conquered China in 1949 extremely valuable.

(2) Ellis Joffe, Party and Army: Professionalism and Political Control in the Chinese Officer Corps, 1949-1964, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965). This excellent work discusses the problem in detail; for example, on p.103, he concludes that Marshal Peng Dehuai and General Huang Kuocheng were dismissed in 1959 essentially for "military professionalism" in their opposition to Mao's disastrous Great Leap Forward policies.

(3) William W. Whitson, The Chinese High Command, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973). A fascinating and convincing account of the military's role in the unfolding of the Chinese Communist Revolution and the first two decades of the PRC.

(4) Harvey W. Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1977 and 1981). This is an excellent organizational study of the PLA, and surveys all of the major components necessary to understand the PLA prior to Mao's demise, as well as many of the earlier changes under Deng Xiaoping.

(5) Harlan Jencks, From Muskets to Missiles: Politics and Professionalism in the Chinese Army, 1945-1981, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1982). A critical examination of the political-military dynamic in the PLA, and the effects that this dynamic has had on the PLA's capabilities as China entered the Deng era.

(6) Ellis Joffe, The Chinese Army After Mao, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987). The author updates his 1965 work, which pre-dated the Cultural revolution; also, he provides a thoughtful evaluation of the changes under Deng. He concludes that this latter period has seen the PLA move dramatically away from the political realm and concentrate on professionalism and modernization.

pivotal in the evaluation of this criterion. In the last chapter, in the section on commander-political commissar relationships, I discussed the commissar's part in the evaluation process for platoon leaders; this description reflected the basic process at every level, from company through the corps.

An officer's family and class background closely related to the political attitude and behavior prior to 1978. Poor peasants, workers, cadre, and military families provided a soldier or officer with an excellent background for Maoist political purposes. The background investigation, *chengfen*, was very extensive, tracing both sides of one's family tree backwards for three generations (oneself, one's parents, and one's grandparents). All family members, and their spouses and the spouses' families, of each generation were investigated and recorded.

My colleague recalled an officer he knew who came from a military background--his father had already served in the PLA for more than thirty years by the time he joined. His father's position counter-balanced what otherwise appeared to be a terrible class and family background. First of all, this officer's mother came from a landlord background, although both of his parents were Party members, going back to the Yenan days. Secondly, he was turned down for Party membership several times, which he said was a very embittering experience for this man. Apparently, although he was never allowed to see his background investigation in order to ascertain the reasons given, his ideas were either too professional, or else too "democratic."

The fourth factor considered in promotions was one's relationships with one's fellow officers, both peers and superiors. Essentially, this factor equated to one's *guanxi* network. Relationships were important for advancement, particularly in the irregular environment created by the Cultural Revolution. Moreover, the nature of the Chinese system required connections vertically and horizontally in the officer ranks, since promotions at the higher levels usually effected changes within those officers' relational networks.¹⁹⁵

The actual promotion process mirrored the evaluation process. First, a unit recognized a need to fill an officer slot in the next subordinate unit level. The commander and the political commissar

¹⁹⁵ William Whitson's thesis in The Chinese High Command revolves around the central military elite and the five field army elites which began in the early days of the Red Army, and continued to influence officer associations throughout the period studied in his book (p.xix). As the elite leaders in these bodies gained or lost, so did their followings. Thus, in the political battles of the Cultural Revolution, when Deng Xiaoping and He Long suffered setbacks, their Second Field Army disciples also suffered (p.196). Lin Biao, on the other hand, former commander of the Fourth Field Army, learned from a minor setback in 1937 (pp.288-289), and was able to use it to cash in on his rival Peng Dehuai's misfortune in 1959. He then used his position as Defense Minister to emplace his own followers in key positions in Beijing (pp.329-331). Harvey Nelsen echoes this theme about the vertical and horizontal cliques:

The higher the echelon, the more important this nascent factionalism becomes, because top-level leaders have a long string of subordinates with whom they have served and the power to promote and transfer these trusted associates. Thus, the top men in the CMC, general staff, political, and rear service departments have their own mental or real "black books" of men they know and trust and would like to promote to responsible positions. As a result, high-level appointments tend to precipitate political struggles and are a potential source of disunity in the PLA. (The Chinese Military System, p.152.)

at the higher level sought out candidates for the job. Once made, they forwarded their selection to their immediate superior level. At this level, the choice was screened very carefully; although the most common practice in the PLA was to fill command and other positions from the officer pool within the unit, there was no requirement for such a practice, and officers were chosen from outside the system occasionally. For division command and higher, the final step was approval from the CMC--the only body with the authority to promote officers to the division and above.

Therefore, the promotion process operated at each level, and was highly decentralized.¹⁹⁶ Corps selected the initial

¹⁹⁶ The officer promotion system in the U.S. Army is completely centralized. Officers receive evaluations once a year, or upon their change of positions, or upon their raters' change of positions. These evaluations are forwarded to the Army's Personnel Command in Alexandria, Virginia, where they are placed in the officers' official military personnel file. The custodians of the officers' files are the basic branches in which the officers were commissioned. Therefore, as an Infantry officer, the Infantry Branch manages my file, my assignments, and my promotions. Each year, officers are selected from the Army at large to sit on promotion boards to evaluate the files of the year groups qualified for promotion to the various ranks; the board members come from a variety of branches to ensure that no branch is favored over the others in the percentage of promotions, since some officers will not be selected, and each branch has a vested interest in the success of its members, especially as selections for the higher ranks are considered. Officers selected early for promotion to major, lieutenant colonel, and colonel tend to pick up momentum towards the higher ranks; so the branches want to protect their interests in this area as well. My year group, 1981, based on the year that I was commissioned and entered active federal service, was automatically considered for promotion to 1st lieutenant after 18 months; and again for captain after three-and-a-half-years, and the selection rate was nearly one hundred percent. In the late 1980s, those automatic considerations and high selection rates began to change, at least for captain and above. My year group was not considered for promotion again for six years, when we were not the primary, but the secondary, or early, year group considered for promotion to major--the first "field grade" rank. That year, year

candidates for division command or political commissar positions, but the regional commands made the tentative decision, with final approval resting with the CMC. The region command held the authority to appoint deputy division commanders, deputy division political commissars, and regimental commanders and political commissars, which were tentatively selected by the corps command. In the case of deputy regimental commanders, deputy regimental political commissars, and battalion commanders and political commissars the division command selected and the corps authorized the final decision. At the deputy battalion and company command level, regiment made the selection, and the division authorized the appointment. Finally, at the deputy company and platoon leader level, battalion selected the candidate to fill the slot, and the regiment authorized the move. My colleague claimed that at every level, candidates came from inside and outside the approving command's personnel; and the selecting and approving authorities

group 1980 was in the primary zone, and year group 1979 received its "last look"--officers in a year group not selected on their third time around were separated from the service. Obviously, the percentage and the numbers of officers decreases at each level, just as the number of positions to be filled decreases. At the battalion and brigade (equivalent to the Chinese regimental level) command level, centralized boards are also held concurrently with the promotion boards to select those officers who will command at this level from the year group being considered for promotion to the lieutenant colonel and colonel ranks. For enlisted soldiers, the company commander has the authority to promote up to the corporal/E-4 level; battalion commanders have the authority to promote to sergeant and staff sergeant; and above that level, promotions are centralized in Alexandria, similar to the officer promotions. Attendance at schools for officers above captain--Command and General Staff College, the Army War College, National Defense University, for example--and for NCOs above staff sergeant/E-6--Advanced NCO Course, etc.--are similarly decided by centralized boards.

did not limit themselves to the personnel within the command. Here, like in the recruiting discussion, he said that the principal consideration was to attain the highest quality possible. However, the discussions by Harvey Nelsen, Whitson, Joffe, and Jencks on this point indicated that the officers making the selections and approvals overwhelmingly favored "native son" candidates because they were not only interested in maintaining or improving the quality of their units, but they also had an overarching interest in their own personal and political survival; their proteges, themselves dependent on their seniors for success, generally were the most secure bets in this regard.

A typical career path for a PLA infantry officer bore certain resemblances to that for his American counterpart. For example, command time was very important, as well as other assignments with troop units. Combat units were considered better assignments than support units. Officers in the better, more modernized units--mechanized infantry, armor, air force and so on--had more opportunities than others for schooling, assignments, and promotions. Field army service time meant better opportunities, as well as faster promotions, particularly at the regimental level and above. Schooling opportunities, as I discussed earlier, identified one as part of the "cream of the crop." My colleague said that since 1985, selection for schools has been considered a kind of "pre-promotion." All of these rules applied generally to American officers, particularly in the combat arms--infantry, armor, artillery, air defense artillery.

My colleague explained that officers usually were locked into one of three types of career paths soon after they finished their company command or company political commissar time. At the lowest level of education for officers, all officers in combat units received essentially the same training. Therefore, an officer candidate was qualified to become either a commander or a political commissar after his platoon leader time. All of the officers at the company level generally had the same education and training, differing only in experience. In the field, the political commissar was just as active as the commander in military training; similarly, the commander generally was as active as the commissar in political education.

Beyond the company level, however, these two positions took on much more specialization. The career tracks became fixed beyond the company, due to the specialization. Education at the advanced military college and beyond also was specialized for each of these tracks. A further specialization, or career track appeared at this level--the staff officer. Staff officers became either operations specialists, political specialists, or else logistics specialists. One's career path followed one of these three paths: command, political commissar, or a staff specialty. Some inter-changing of these career paths occurred, such as an infantry commanding serving as an operations staff officer, then returning to the command track; but such occurrences were rare. Although an officer indicated his preference, decisions about career paths were made according to the best interests of the PLA, not the individual's

wishes.

5.5 Problems for officers and relationships between company officers.

I asked my colleague to explain what he considered to be "career stoppers" in the PLA. He named three primary ones; the first two were easily predicted: poor performance, and bad politics. But the third was an interesting answer. He termed it *zuofeng wenti*--immoral sexual relations. Drinking, which had become the bane of the U.S. Army officer's career (especially driving under the influence of alcohol), was not considered a big problem in the PLA or in Chinese society, he said. But adultery or pre-marital sexual relations ruined careers. He said that this problem, when it occurred, actually overshadowed bad politics; it was *zui da wenti*, "the big one."

As a single officer, he felt great pressure in this particular area. Even the appearance posed problems. Once, while he was recruiting in a commune, a young woman took a shine to him. He ignored her, he said, but she persisted by sending him letters at his unit. He grew so worried about this that he took all of the letters to the regimental political department to show that he was not hiding anything. Later, she apparently came to the unit seeking him, but he did not encounter her. He remembered a soldier in his squad once criticizing himself in a squad meeting for having sexual relations with his fiancée prior to joining the PLA! Fortunately for this fellow, he was credited with good judgment for initiating his confession; although his offense was considered very

serious, his peers and superiors limited their criticisms because of his proper attitude and initiative.

Another major difficulty for officers was dealing with the personal problems of their soldiers. My colleague did not wish to discuss these in detail, but he agreed that my experiences as a platoon leader and company commander reflected in some ways these difficulties. However, he pointed out that, as I previously discussed in Chapters Three and Four, these problems were kept to a tight minimum due to the spartan nature of PLA life. Usually, the company commander and political commissar exercised their authority in any serious case, so platoon leaders did not get in over their heads in these situations.

As a platoon leader, I experienced several problems with my men which really opened my eyes to the real world. For instance, I had a sergeant and a staff sergeant who both believed their wives were being unfaithful to them; their own unfaithfulness magnified their concerns. Therefore, they concocted a scheme by which one or both of them could sneak back home in the middle of a field exercise--over one hundred miles away! When my platoon sergeant and I uncovered their chicanery, we squelched it for the duration of the field exercise. The staff sergeant, a squad leader, became so unsettled that he could not function properly. To our chagrin, we did not discover this until he had unwittingly led his squad down the wrong trail in the middle of the night, breaking contact with the rest of a company combat patrol. He did not discover his error for several hours, and kept marching his squad, in a dense

wooded area, down this logging trail several kilometers out of our sector. He later explained to me that he thought that we were ahead of him the whole time, but simply moving too fast for him to keep up, and he was trying to overtake us; that was why he did not turn around and return to find the company first sergeant until morning.¹⁹⁷

Both of these leaders were ineffective throughout the remainder of the field exercise--two weeks in duration. My platoon sergeant and I agreed to relieve them after we returned from the maneuvers; the first sergeant and commander also agreed after reviewing the platoon's performance and our written statements. I received two severe informal reprimands from my commander during the exercise (scorching the seat of my pants), reinforced by a negative counseling letter detailing my platoon's deficiencies after we had returned to our home station.

¹⁹⁷ The magnitude of this error becomes clear when the reader considers that we were on a straight dirt road going fairly steeply downhill, in the middle of dense woods, travelling single file, with each man following the man in front of him. Knowing that the squad leader was not up to par, I had placed his squad between two other squads in my platoon to guard against just such an occurrence. The squad behind his, although they initially lost contact with the rest of the patrol, quickly corrected themselves when they realized that they were going uphill, since in the operations order I had explicitly briefed them that we were going to march down off our mountaintop position to the valley below and infiltrate a village held by enemy forces. Additionally, they had passed word up the errant squad's column that they were going the wrong direction! Further, our practice, learned through hard experience in Army Ranger School, was to stop every so often and ensure that our unit was together. We did so at the bottom of the mountain--two kilometers from the start--and discovered that this squad was missing, and that the other squad was just catching up to us. I then ran back up the slope to the company position to find the lost squad; but I did not know that they had somehow wandered onto another trail. The first sergeant had not seen them since we left; he sent out a party to search for them, and I ran back to rejoin the patrol which was already on the move again.

Commanders and commissars sometimes had problems and conflicts over authority, and who should exercise initiative in given situations. Platoon leaders competed with each other by trying to attain the highest records of performance. In both of these cases, performance of the unit was key, because promotion consideration rested largely on the unit's performance. The best platoon leader in the company would be considered for the company's command, or equivalent position within the battalion or regiment. Those with less sparkling performances stood the chance of being demobilized, although during the Cultural Revolution era promotions were largely at a standstill, as noted earlier. But relations among the unit's officers were at least formally correct. Even during the Cultural Revolution, relations at the company level remained normal. The conflicts came at the higher headquarters levels, because of ideological and political struggles between key personalities.¹⁹⁸

My colleague recalled an officer who had the best company in the regiment, but who also had strained relations with the battalion commander and political commissar; they felt that this officer's attitude was too cocky, and that he was too outspoken in defense of his soldiers. Because his soldiers loved him, and he had excellent relations with his political commissar and subordinate officers, and the regimental commander's approval due to his superior performance, this officer did not suffer adversely from this situation. Performance was the key to success and

¹⁹⁸ Nelsen, The Chinese Military System, pp.148-150, discussing a "young Turk" movement in the PLA during the Cultural Revolution.

survival.

The whole period of change from 1976 on was tumultuous for many in the PLA. In January, 1976, my colleague remembered mourning for Zhou Enlai. Later that Spring, Deng Xiaoping was purged again, and Zhu De died. In July, the Tongshan earthquake destroyed my colleague's barracks; they lived in tents for a number of months after that. Then in September, Mao Zedong died. He recalled that the unit was informed that they were to assemble in front of their tents to await an important broadcast on the radio from Beijing. At 4:00 p.m., they assembled to listen to the announcement that the Chairman was dead, followed by a statement by the Party. Everyone cried, and it was extremely sad. Afterwards, they discussed the Party statement. When the Gang of Four was purged, however, they celebrated with a banquet.

The effects of the reforms provided some poignant, and difficult, moments in the PLA. The main impact felt at the company and battalion level involved the trimming of the ranks. The new age limits caused a lot of heartache as senior officers and officers well past the new age limits were forced to retire.¹⁹⁹ My colleague said that this was probably one of the toughest jobs the PLA has had to perform, and it was difficult to watch or take part in this process. Also, the PLA faced the difficulty of finding all

¹⁹⁹ Yoon, p.9: "Resistance to the PLA reforms seems to come primarily from the old commanders for reasons of personal interest, or ideology, or both. The old veterans who have spent a good part of their lives in the PLA are afraid of the prospect of losing the power and perquisites they have long enjoyed. They are very reluctant to simply fade away. Obviously, they resent Deng's PLA reform policy, which stresses youth and military professionalism."

of these officers jobs in the civilian sector. Unit morale suffered in some cases, as particularly well respected or beloved officers were de-activated. The officers in a unit generally held a farewell banquet or party for departing officers; and the PLA paid them a one-time, lump sum pension as a form of severance pay, in addition to the guaranteed civilian job.

The PLA officer corps was a fairly competent body. Their political struggles, woven into the pattern of political confrontations which stormed across the Chinese landscape during the Maoist years, seemed to have affected and retarded their development, and the development of the PLA as a whole. Yet, they performed at least sufficiently in every conflict in the PRC's history, and the PLA remained a credible deterrent to any adversary considering the invasion of China; even the Soviet Union did not operate along the Chinese border with impunity. What long-term effect the reforms might have remained to be seen; but in the short run, the PLA officer corps seemed to have improved its professionalism and training, and halted the slide towards combat ineffectiveness to which the Sino-Vietnam War bore witness. In the long run, such ineffectiveness, thereby eroding the deterrent impact of the army, was the unforgivable sin of any officer corps; in the annals of military history there has never been an acceptable excuse for such a failing.

CONCLUSION

The following conclusions were based in part on comments made by my colleague about the conditions in the PLA and Chinese society in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as well as my own analysis of his comments and the details expressed in this paper. Since I felt that the recruiting system in the PLA was the most extraordinary feature of the PLA described in this paper, I built my conclusions around that feature and the changes that the reforms have effected on it and on the PLA.

The recruiting system discussed in Chapter Two perfectly matched the PLA's needs, and characterized the PLA throughout the Maoist era in the PRC. The conscription laws of the mid-1950s reflected the routinization and normalization of governmental and military functions after the CCP had consolidated its victory in China. The subsequent atrophy of political controls in the PLA was one of the factors leading to the upheavals of the Great Leap Forward, and the dismissal of the top military leader, Peng Dehuai. Under Lin Biao, political controls in the military were re-instituted, and the stage was set for the Cultural Revolution showdown between Mao and the Party technocrats. The recruiting system developed along with these events, becoming the regularized system described in this paper.

In the 1970s, during my colleague's tenure, the recruiting system reflected the unsteady but working relationship between the Party and the PLA, with both sides not quite trusting the other, but necessarily relying on each other for their mutual survival.

Despite the theoretical control that the Party exercised over the PLA, I believe that the evidence showed that the PLA enjoyed several advantages in this relationship, and was able to garner extraordinary benefits from these advantages which the civil society did not enjoy. Therefore, one would expect that the recruiting system reflected the impact of the Deng-era reforms on the PLA and its relationship with the Party and society. Indeed, that was the case in the 1980s.

Just as the military modernizations took the lowest position on the totem pole of economic priorities and the Four Modernizations, so, too, did PLA service take a low position in the economic calculations of peasants and urban residents. Even in the rural areas, people began to gain better living standards than the PLA offered. Although the officer path to success was still coveted, people realized that only a tiny percentage made the grade, and the cost of military service began to be prohibitive, when compared to the new opportunities. In urban areas, factory workers and government workers received bonuses, sometimes larger than their salaries; PLA soldiers generally did not receive salaries, and officers and soldiers who received salaries were never paid bonuses. So, the economic benefit of the PLA began to disappear.

Politically, the military became less privileged. One reason for this was the pronouncement by Deng Xiaoping that there was no more class struggle. This pronouncement eased the situation economically and politically for those people formerly undesirable

to the CCP and the PLA. But it also allowed more forms of expression and economic activity, and a greater role for the universities. When the universities re-opened in 1978, their obvious benefits made them much more attractive to the more educated and talented members of society, and they appealed to a broader section of society. More high school graduates began to apply to universities; even if they were not accepted, they did not immediately register for the PLA as in the past. Instead, they found more profitable work, and bided their time waiting for another chance to apply for higher education. Therefore, the prestige of the PLA diminished because the opening of the universities and the end of the class struggle provided more attractive avenues for upward mobility. In this way, the political benefit offered by the PLA disappeared also.

Even the reforms to modernize the PLA had unforeseen results. Because the PLA required all officers to have a certain degree of education and military training, primary and secondary education became a premium which most peasants could not afford. Soldiers from the ranks who wished to pursue the officer career path were required to be high school graduates, since the new education requirements for officers were extremely demanding; also, potential officer candidates had to pass a fairly rigorous examination, which further narrowed the field. For the reasons outlined above, as well as these educational requirements, the PLA began to recruit more heavily from the urban areas, where young people generally attained a higher level of education. This caused the third

benefit offered by the PLA to rural residents--the possibility for selection to the officer ranks-- to effectively evaporate.

As a result of these benefits disappearing or diminishing, the PLA encountered severe problems in recruiting, either in urban areas or rural areas. A shortage of well-qualified candidates developed--in a nation of 1.2 billion which needed only to provide approximately seven-hundred-fifty thousand recruits each year! Although service was officially compulsory, it had been voluntary in practice for so long that the PLA found no way to compel young people to register for conscription. The dilemma that the PLA faced was that if everyone was forced to register--some 182,000,000 in 1989, according to the CIA--the system would have broken down under the load. If people were forced arbitrarily, then the system could not be justified. My colleague said that in conversations with officer friends familiar with the new recruiting situation in the 1980s, they defined the problem as simply this: if the PLA did not force everyone to register, then they could not force anyone to register.

With the loss of incentives in the form of the benefits outlined above, young people in rural and urban areas simply did not want to register. They either wanted to study for national entrance examinations for universities, or else they wanted to enter into some form of enterprise and earn the profits available under the reforms. Otherwise, they wanted to enter some form of trade school and learn a trade or profession. Since the PLA's main attraction to young people involved self-interest through an

increased standard of living and improved potential for the future--ideological rhetoric aside--once the PLA failed to offer such attractions, it lost its power to attract above-average young people.

Therefore, the quality of soldiers declined steadily in the PLA in the 1980s.²⁰⁰ My colleague stated that young people with criminal records who could not find jobs were typically the ones registering for the PLA!²⁰¹ My colleague's friends told him of various horror stories indicating the deplorable conditions in the PLA. One infantry company of one-hundred-forty men had fifty percent illiterate soldiers, and another twenty percent had criminal records. Recruiters, who previously balked at the prospect of facing a ratio of candidates to quota slots of less than three to one, now felt fortunate to find ratios at an even one to one. Recruiters were forced to take every candidate that a local area offered. In some counties, eighty candidates were offered for each quota of one hundred recruits.

Under such conditions, the PLA and MAC had to take drastic measures to try to restore the health of the manpower in the PLA. Each of the three areas of incentives was overhauled to make the

²⁰⁰ Chong K. Yoon, "Problems of Modernizing the PLA: Domestic Constraints," p.8, notes that the CCP leadership was alarmed by the deterioration of discipline in the PLA.

²⁰¹ Paul Beaver and Bridget Harney, "The Role of the PLA in Tiananmen Square," in Paul Beaver, editor, Jane's Special Report: China in Crisis, (Coulson, England: Jane's Information Group, 1989), pp.23-24, cites a People's Daily report bemoaning the fact that criminal elements filled the PLA, and that it had become a "stupid army."

PLA once again an appealing career for young people. Some of these measures were short-term fixes designed to plug up holes in the dike. But others were certain to have long-term effects, as I will discuss later. Economically, the pay scale for enlisted soldiers and officers was increased dramatically, especially for enlisted soldiers. Salaries were increased four to six times what was paid soldiers in the 1970s, so that soldier pay scales rivaled the basic salaries of factory workers. In addition, factory workers who joined the PLA were guaranteed their factory wages throughout their time in the PLA. Rural recruits received guarantees that the local governments would subsidize their families while they were in the PLA--something which had previously existed theoretically, but which hardly happened in practice prior to these guarantees. These last two examples seemed to me to have been short-term fixes; the CCP could not possibly guarantee these benefits in perpetuity. The formerly mentioned salary increases seemed more long-term, since the CCP controlled PLA wages. This, coupled with a new provision which allowed voluntary soldiers to remain in the PLA for twenty or more years--which truly made the PLA a career for enlisted personnel--created the conditions for a new type of army, as I shall discuss.

Politically, families with sons in the PLA were to garner more respect than in the past. However, this seemed an empty claim, since the CCP could not control how people viewed the PLA nor families with sons serving in the PLA, especially since the local government and, therefore, the local community had to subsidize

them while the son served. Guarantees were made to recruits that they would be allowed to enter universities at lower minimum scores than the norm on the university entrance examinations. Also, the standards for soldiers entering into military schools for officer training were lowered, below that of students entering right out of high school; my colleague believed that the examinations for these soldiers also were geared for people with junior middle school educations, as well. Urban soldiers received priority on opportunities for government jobs when they got out, and were guaranteed jobs regardless of the local job situation--this was no longer the case for the average young person in the city. However, rural recruits no longer had an opportunity to change their residence status from rural to urban.

All in all, the new incentives had a positive result; still, many recruiting problems were not yet solved. Recruiting quality did not approach the standards of the 1970s. The recruiting ratio never reached the three to one mark customary for the earlier period. Nonetheless, quality had improved, and was roughly good enough to meet the requirements of the PLA's mission. Also, the recruiting ratio did climb to approximately one-and-a-half to one--enough to meet the quotas.

The problems with this system would re-emerge if the PRC faced the same types of economic problems which staggered the USSR in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Quality among officers and soldiers remained on a tenuous perch. This affected readiness, training, and the perception of the PLA in the minds of the Chinese public.

But the points to which I alluded above indicate that Chinese society, and the PLA with it, were moving in a direction which might tend to solidify the PLA as an effective institution in the PRC while securing, almost unwittingly, the industrial and economic development of the PRC. As I discussed in Chapter Four, the PLA had no NCO Corps. Officer leaders performed the duties traditionally identified with the NCO in Western armies. The political commissar and the Party committee structure performed much of the function of the NCO Corps, except that it duplicated many of the efforts of the officers and carried an overriding veto power over the chain-of-command. I believe that this structure, and the absence of an NCO Corps, ultimately denigrated the effectiveness of the PLA. It ultimately violated the principle of war called "the unity of command." Officers were expected to plan their operations, training and daily schedules; adopt correct political attitudes; and attend to the daily affairs of their troops. Add to those the cares and worries of a family, the possibility of combat, and the political chaos of China during the Maoist years. No officer, no matter how zealous and dedicated, could possibly juggle all of those balls; something eventually had to fall and slip through the cracks.

The Vietnam War demonstrated that at the operational level--where officers were supposed to excel due to the focus of an officer's training and attention as opposed to that of an NCO--the PLA let a major operation slip through the cracks. Even though the soldiers and officers at the company level performed admirably for

the most part, the outcome indicated that the PLA was not the regional power which had trounced India in 1962. Actually, observers should have expected the PLA to perform well at the lower levels, and to falter at the operational level simply because of this omission of an NCO Corps.

Officers in the PLA were really trained to be good NCOs--my feeling was that the PLA's emphasis on politics, basic skills taught by the junior officers, and the dearth of education in the ranks actually produced an army filled with professional NCOs. Their focus, especially at the junior officer level, really paralleled the functions which I outlined in Chapter Four as the duties and responsibilities of sergeants. Officers were supposed to look at the big picture, and leave the majority of details to the NCOs. PLA officers could not do that, and the effect followed them throughout their careers. What was an officer supposed to do? S.L.A. Marshall provided an excellent commentary:

Just as a rough approximation. any officer's work week should comprise about 50 percent execution and the other half study, if he is to make the best use of his powers.

Ideally, an officer should be able to do the work of anyone serving under him. There are even some command situations in which the ideal becomes altogether attainable and a wholly practicable objective....However, the greater part of military operation in present days is noteworthy for the extreme diversity and complexity of its parts, and instead of becoming more simplified, the trend is toward greater elaboration. Indeed, the rate of change has accelerated steadily since 1945, and military power, paced by discoveries in the physical sciences, has undergone a more radical transformation than in all previous centuries....No one expects [the average good officer] to know more about radio repair than the repairman, more about mapping than the cartographer, more about moving parts than a gunsmith...more about handling a critical mass safely than the sergeant especially schooled for the task. If the Services were to set any such unreasonable standard for the commissioned body, all would shortly move over into the lunatic

fringe....The distinction lies in the difference between the power to do a thing well and that of being able to judge when it is well done....Adjustment to a job and, finally, mastery of it, by a military officer come of persistent pursuit of this principle. The main technique is study and constant reexamination of criteria. To take the correct measure of standards of performance as to the value of the work itself and as to the abilities of personnel, one must become immersed in knowledge of the nature and purpose of all operations. There is no shortcut to this grasp of affairs....Book study of the subject, specialized courses in the Service schools, the instructive comments of one's superiors, the informed criticism of hands further down the line, and the weighing of human experience at every source and by every recourse are the paths to an informed judgment.

...Unless the American officer can think of the whole nation as his workshop and, along with his other duties, will apply himself as a student, seeking to understand more and more about the richness and the adaptability of our tremendous resources, neither he nor the country will be relatively ready when war comes.

...As with all problems developing within group organization, one truth applies: the problem itself must first be seen, its proportions fully developed, and its causes analyzed until they are competently understood, before true progress becomes possible. These things done, the final approved solutions will almost automatically suggest themselves. Final accomplishment is not so much a matter of wisdom in dreaming up a formula as of diligence in learning all possible about the problem....Advance comes from patient, plodding work in the collecting of information. Imaginative use of it is but a by-product of the main thing. Intuitive judgment comes out of sweat.²⁰²

Accepting Marshall's definition of the concepts, attitudes, and functions which should occupy an officer, my contention remained that the PLA produced very few officers able to perform these kinds of functions, simply because they were too busy doing the work of NCOs. Thus, they did not know how to "think of the whole nation as their workshop" nor how to take full advantage of the tremendous resources available in China. I did not mean to say

²⁰² S.L.A. Marshall, The Armed Forces Officer, (Washington: Armed Forces Information Service, Department of Defense, Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-2, 1975), pp.97, 99-100, 102, 103.

that they did not possess the talent for such an outcome, only that their system focused on the wrong means and ends. But, as I mentioned before, the development of what Professor Donald Munro has called a "renaissance" in China during the past decade and a half has created the conditions which may serve to force the PLA into becoming a more professionalized, significantly less politicized force. Indeed, some observers might say that a race against the clock was involved, as the effects of Tiananmen Square's tragedy, the aging and passing of the revolutionary "Old Guard," and the problems of reform take their toll on the national consciousness. Be that as it may, my point hinged on the following elements.

First, the PLA's increased pay scale and extended terms of service ought to have an effect of producing professional enlisted soldiers in the army. Second, longevity and continuity would be extended, and recruiting needs could diminish somewhat. As these soldiers became more and more seasoned and experienced, they should take over more of the functions of the platoon leaders which I have labelled as belonging in the realm of non-commissioned officers. As they do this, they most likely will press for the establishment of an NCO Corps; the examples of the Soviet, American, and Taiwanese armies probably would not be overlooked by this group. Officers, already on the track of increased educational requirements, would welcome these innovations, and press for their adoption at the national level; at the same time, they would be making the transition to the model espoused by Marshall.

As these forces in the PLA exerted pressure on the CCP and the PRC government to adopt these changes, there would almost certainly be political resistance. Yet, again, the lessons of other military systems ought not to be lost on the proponents and decisionmakers; that is, the military in most countries, even if apolitical, as the U.S. Army largely has been, still supported the ruling class, and tended to be extremely conservative. The PLA could still be controlled by the CCP, but much of the detracting effects in the company of the Party structure and the political commissar system would be eliminated. This position on the de-politicizing of the PLA was not a new concept in China or elsewhere; Peng Dehuai actively implemented policies which allowed the PLA political structure to atrophy under his tutelage.

The aspect of the reforms and the economic development in China which was new, and perhaps unanticipated, was that the increased urbanization and industrialization, and the concomitant increase in educational levels among urban youths, raised the potential militarization level of China. John Keegan, in his book, The Second World War, discussed the effects of urbanization, militarization and industrialization upon each other. He concluded that each had an intensifying effect on the others: urbanization, with improved foods and health care improved the quality of potential soldiers even as it increased the numbers of them geometrically (this disabused the PLA notion that peasants made the best soldiers, although I noted in Chapter Two that, generically, urban areas were rated higher than rural areas on the quality of

soldiers produced); militarization and the need for ever more effective weaponry stoked the engines of industry more than perhaps any other single factor; the increased industrialization correspondingly increased the urbanization process due to the jobs and growing population. Thus, a spiral rose from these factors, each factor's increase leading to further increase in the others, and, therefore, itself.²⁰³

As the PLA found itself requiring more educated soldiers, it began to recruit more heavily in the urban areas. But another factor noted by Keegan, and which I touched upon earlier, was the less pliable nature of urban recruits.²⁰⁴ PLA officers liked rural soldiers since they did not complain or question orders; their limited education accounted for much of this tractability. This also called into question the idea that the PLA was so much more democratic at lower levels than American units. Obviously, officers did not like to have their orders questioned, and favored

²⁰³ John Keegan, The Second World War, (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), pp.12-22. On pp. 23 and 24, he writes:

In truth, however, all the soldiers who marched to war in 1914 formed a badge of the modernity of the states to which they belonged. They were fit, strong, faultlessly clothed and equipped, armed with weapons of unparalleled lethality, and inspired by the belief that they were free men who, in free activity on the battlefield, would win prompt and decisive victories. Above all they were numerous. No society on earth had ever proportionately put forth soldiers in such numbers as Europe did in August 1914.

²⁰⁴ Keegan, The Second World War, p.21: "...The ultimate importance of universal conscription in changing attitudes to military service was that it ultimately connected with liberty, in its political if not its personal sense. The old armies had been instruments of oppression of the people by kings; the new armies were to be instruments of the people's liberation from kings."

the group of soldiers which would comply without much protest. But the reforms and the requirement for education among soldiers reduced this compliant group. This also would, I submit, have tended towards the development of a professional NCO Corps in the PLA, as well as influencing changes within Chinese society--hence Professor Munro's insistence on a Chinese "renaissance."

In conclusion, I want to return to the comparison that I made between the Israeli Army and the PLA. Both raised up officers from the enlisted ranks, and relied on the continued support of the civilian population. But there were differences, not the least of which was that the Israelis also had an NCO Corps. But such a military system worked for a small, elite army like the Israeli Defense Force because the whole society was daily confronted with the need for military preparedness, the capabilities for a strong deterrent, and retributational and pre-emptive strikes. But for a nation such as China, massive, imposing, full of enormous potential, such a system was inappropriate after it had served its purpose.

Just as the Manchus set aside their Eight Banner military state and appropriated the trappings of imperial China, including its armies; so, too, should the CCP and PLA have set aside the "Yenan way," and established the PRC as the superpower it promised to be. The continued reliance on the militia for logistics support; the political anchor which might also be described as an albatross; and the emphasis on people's war in the age of combined arms combat all served to illustrate the highly defensive nature of

the PLA and the relative weakness of China.

The forces of change were moving in China, as I described above. The PLA, as the only significant armed force in China, promised to survive these forces and benefit from them. But just as the armies of the 19th century, as Keegan described, were armies of liberation from kings, so might the armies of the 21st century be armies of liberation from doddering regimes incapable of meeting the demands of their societies for sustenance, peace, and political freedom. Professor Yoon rightly commented that for the PRC to achieve its goals, what it needed was peace:

Any serious international conflict that threatens China's security would force Chinese leaders to reassess the priority assigned to military modernization, seriously disrupting the Four Modernizations. Another imponderable which lies in the area of domestic politics is that a disruption of the reformist leadership after the succession to Deng...may seriously affect the modernization drive. The Long March on which China has embarked to achieve the Four Modernizations may be more arduous than the earlier one.²⁰⁵

As the PLA enjoyed the larger budget awarded to it, ostensibly for its role in cracking down on the protesters in Beijing in 1989, its leaders probably considered the same thoughts expressed by Professor Yoon. I believed that the PLA, all rhetoric to the contrary, would be involved in the succession to Deng, and would have a say in the course followed by his successors. The changes which I outlined above I believed were inevitable, but they were not approaching so rapidly as to "make a leopard change his spots," so to speak. It truly was a race against time; the military needed

²⁰⁵ Yoon, pp.19-20.

to reform thoroughly, along with the Party, government, and economy. As Keegan pointed out, militarization, industrialization, and urbanization all fed upon one another, and provided benefits to society. But, as the two world wars sadly demonstrate, these factors also had their abysmal sides. GOD forbid that the changes in China outstrip the capacity of the government and the military to keep pace with them and provide some form of stable leadership after the tragedies of the past forty years.

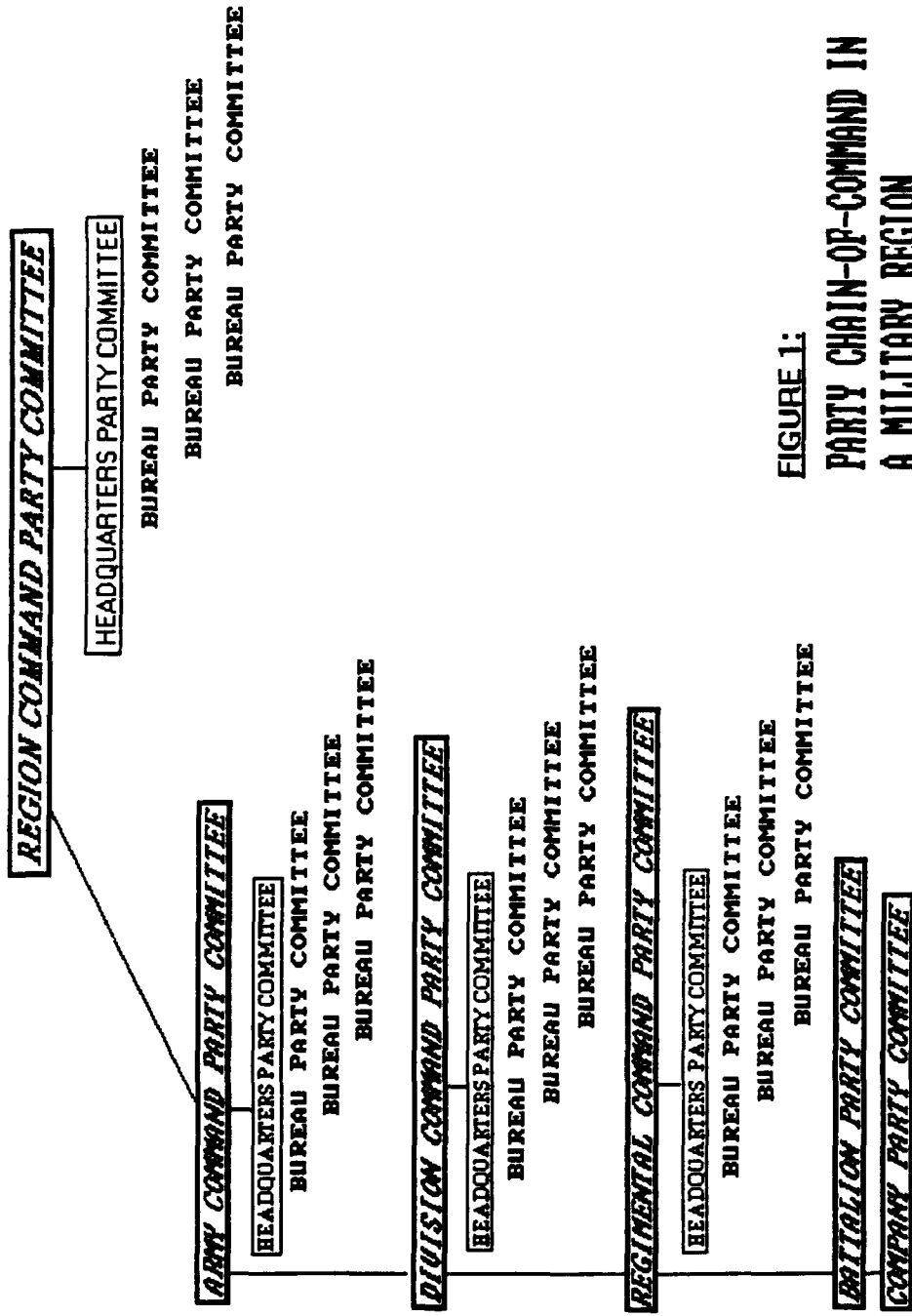


FIGURE 1:
PARTY CHAIN-OF-COMMAND IN
A MILITARY REGION

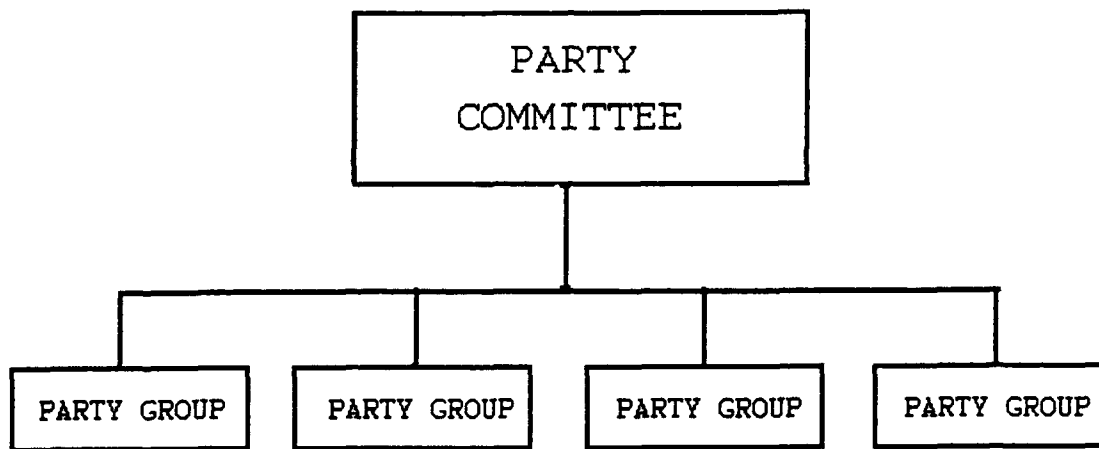


FIGURE 2: PARTY COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

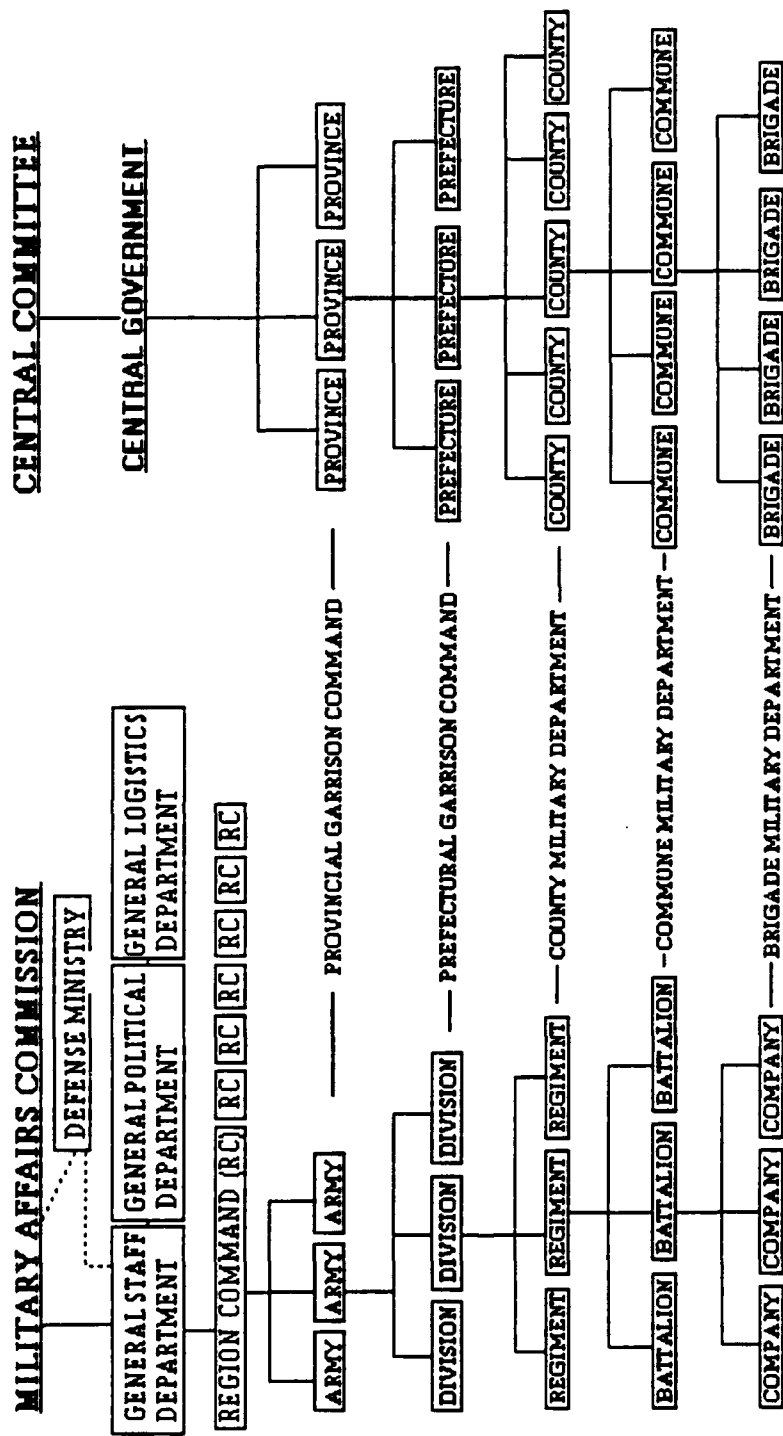


FIGURE 3: "TWIN PILLARS" ANALOGY OF CIVILIAN-MILITARY OVERLAP

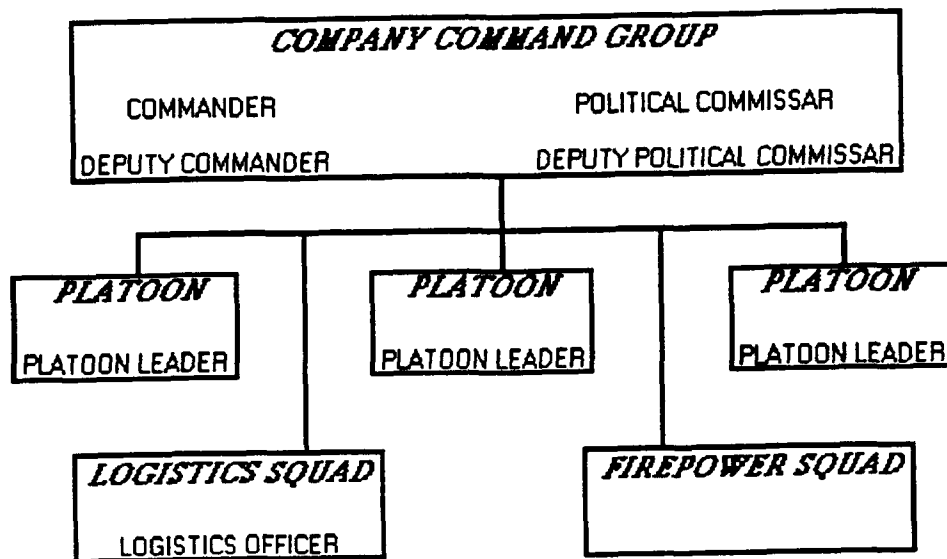


FIGURE 4: COMPANY STRUCTURE AND OFFICERS

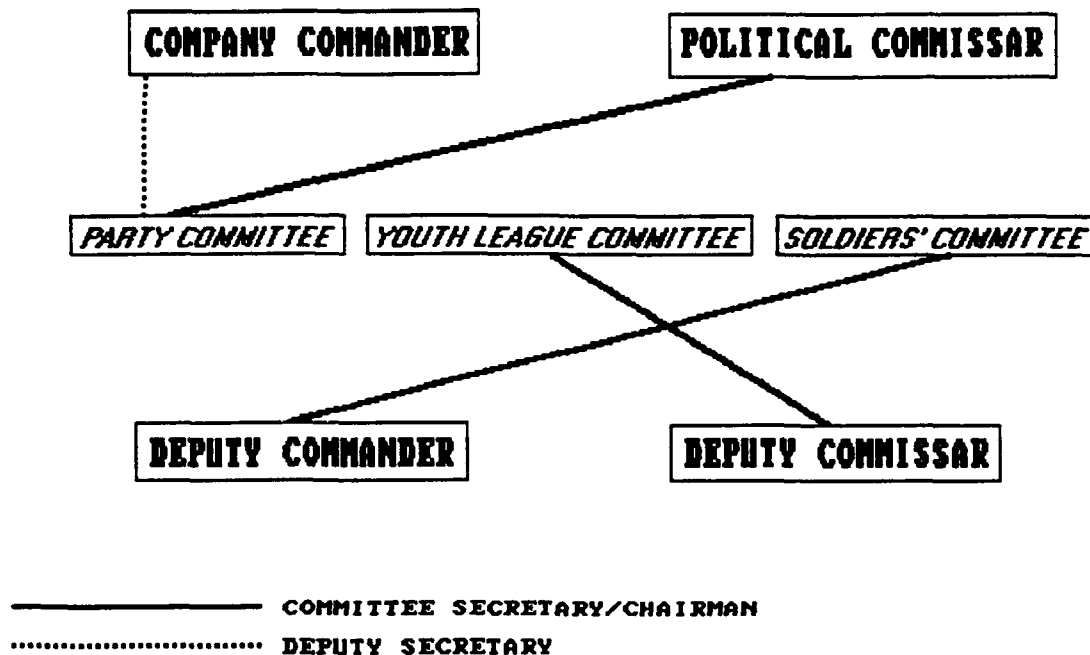


FIGURE 5: COMPANY POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS AND
COMMAND GROUP DIVISION OF LABOR

FIGURE 6: A TYPICAL COMPANY BARRACKS ARRANGEMENT

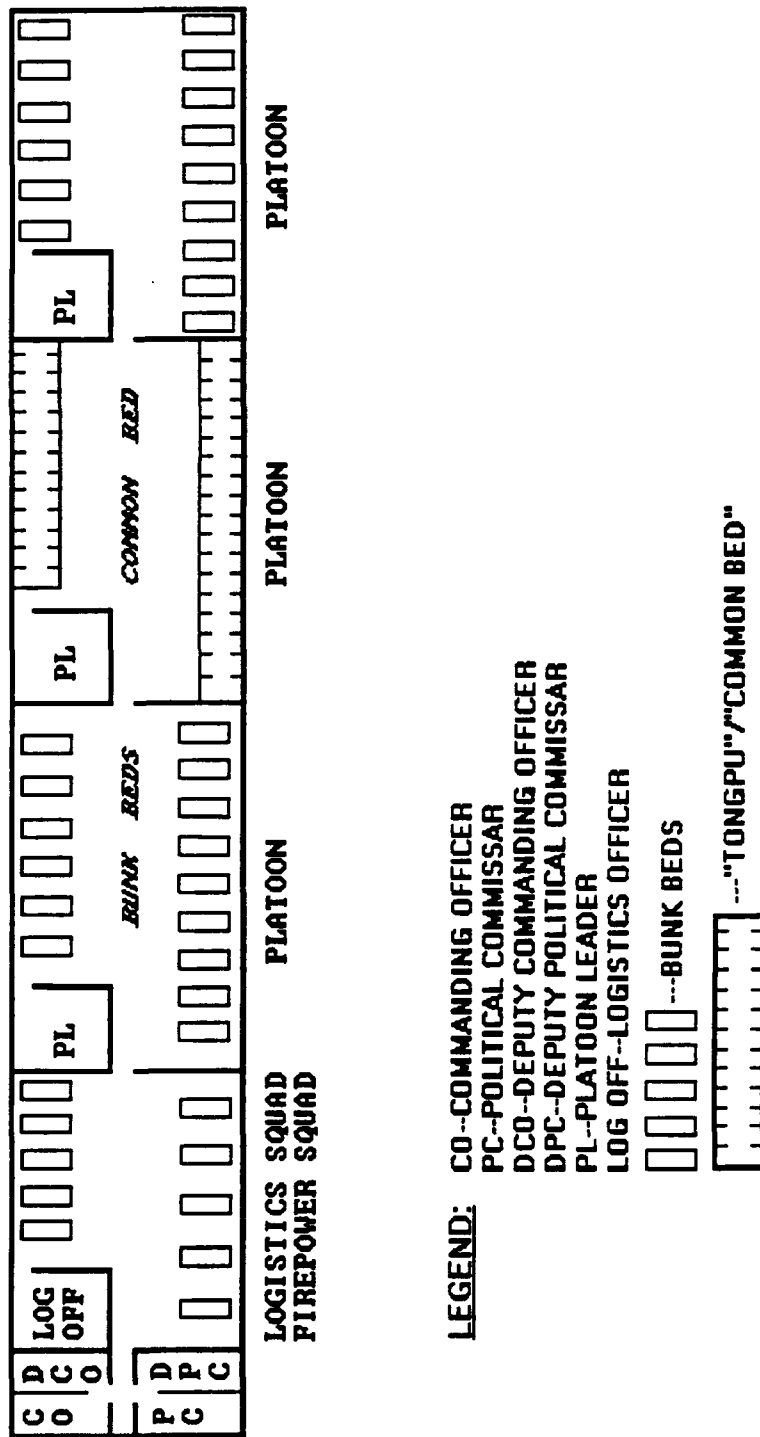
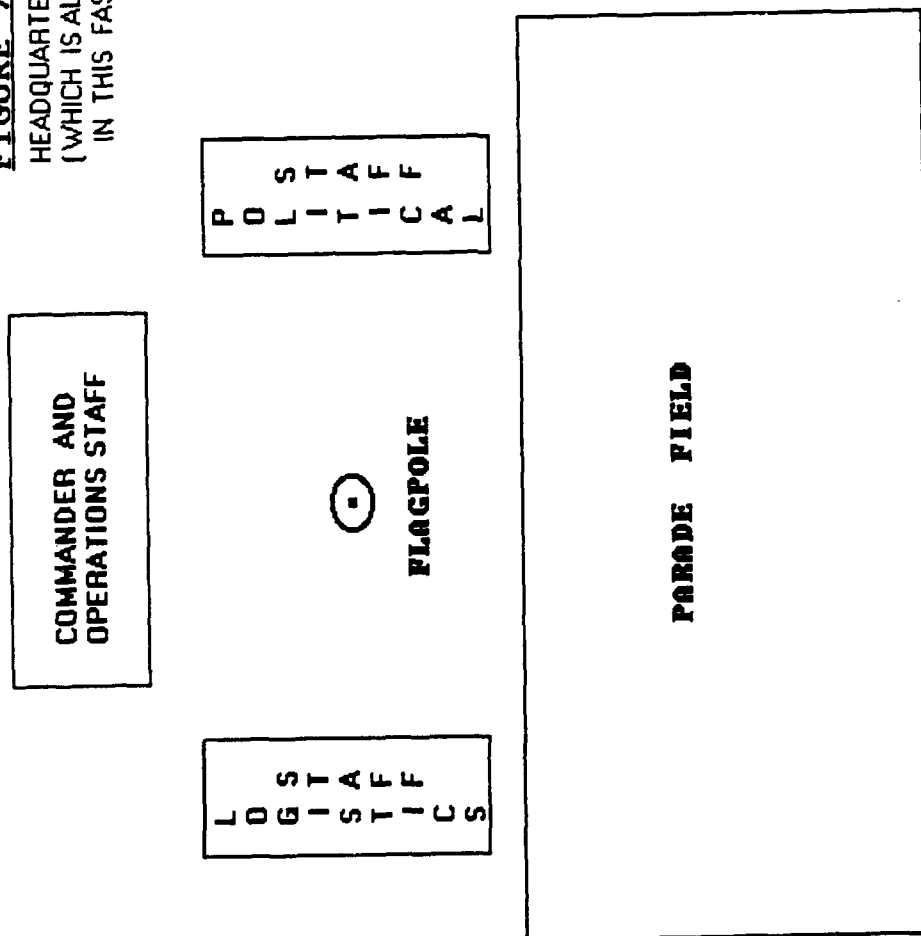


FIGURE 7: A TYPICAL
HEADQUARTERS CONFIGURATION
(WHICH IS ALWAYS ARRANGED
IN THIS FASHION)



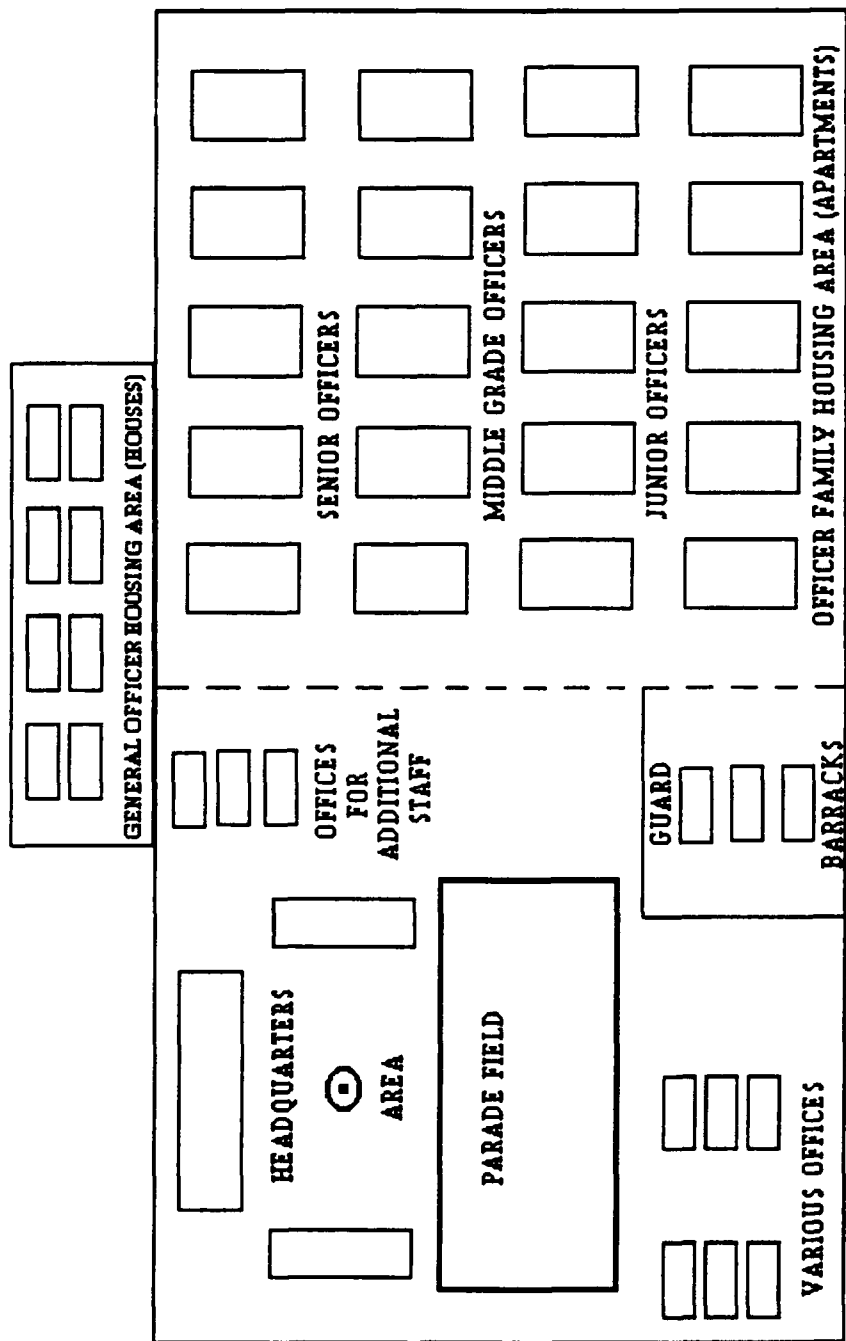


FIGURE 8: A TYPICAL MILITARY REGION HEADQUARTERS BASE

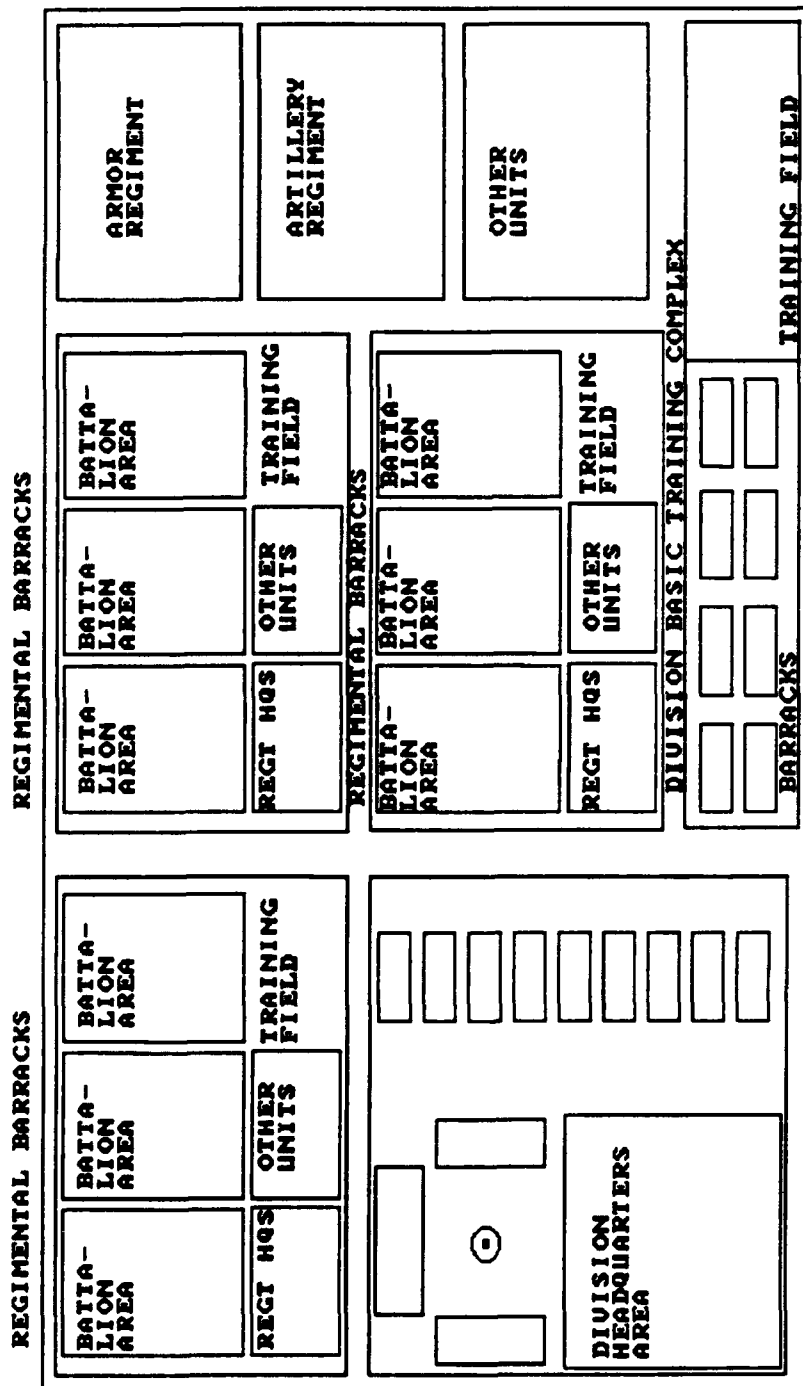
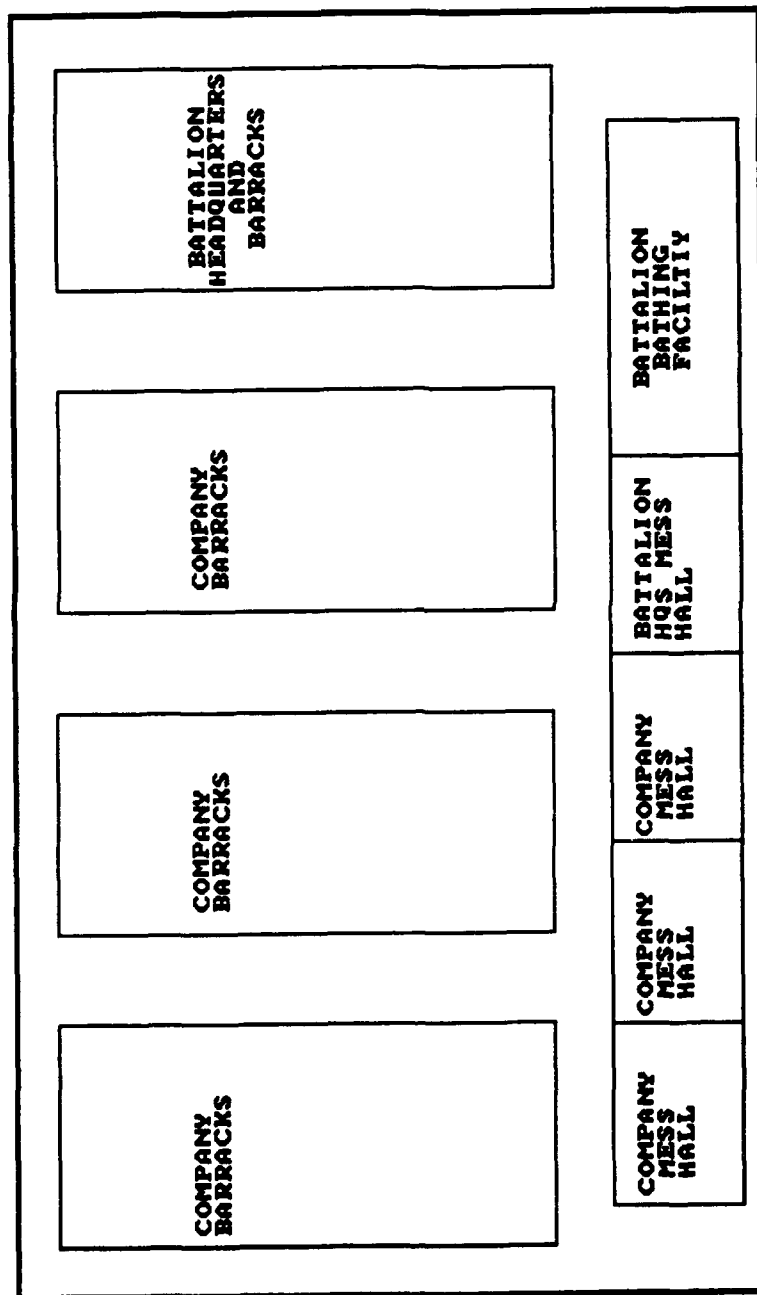


FIGURE 9: A TYPICAL DIVISION BASE (GARRISON)

FIGURE 10: A TYPICAL BATTALION BARRACKS AREA



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